

Hosea: The Boundless Love of God

Hosea 1:1-11

Introduction

Together, we have been going through the prophetic books of the Old Testament, and today we are going to focus on the book of Hosea.

Hosea is one of the most memorable books of the Bible for me because the first class I took in seminary was on Hosea. Whenever I read it, it takes me back to the tension I felt as a brand new seminary student. And Hosea was not a book I particularly wanted to read at that time, because there are so many things in this book that are not easy to accept. However, when I read Hosea afresh, I was able to get a sense of God's great and deep love for us. Today, I would like us to learn from the book of Hosea, and think together on the theme of "The Boundless Love of God."

Our passage today is Hosea 1:1-11.

Hosea 1:1-11

¹ The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beerī, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

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." ³ So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.

⁴ And the Lord said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. ⁵ And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

⁶ She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. ⁷ But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

⁸ When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. ⁹ And the Lord said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

¹⁰ Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." ¹¹ And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

This is the living Word of God.

In this passage the Lord shows us his boundless love through the prophet Hosea. First, because of God's boundless love, he uses Hosea's marriage relationship to demonstrate that man has fallen into sin. Second, because of God's boundless love, he judges

sinner. Third, because of God's boundless love, he brings sinners into his covenant. In summary, we'll be talking about the fall of man, the judgment of sinners, and the invitation into the covenant.

The book of Hosea is the first of what are called the Minor Prophets, the twelve prophetic books that run from Hosea to Malachi at the very back of the Old Testament. Last week, we read the book of Daniel together, but the book of Hosea is from a time before Daniel.

Verse 1 says, **“The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.”** In the days of Hosea, the kingdom of Israel was divided into the northern and southern kingdoms. During that time, the kings of the southern kingdom of Judah were Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. These kings ruled the country from about 782 to 687 BC. And the king in the north, the kingdom of Israel, was Jeroboam. He is said to have been king from 782 to 753 BC. And the prophet Hosea was a prophet who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel.

So first, out of His boundless love, the Lord shows us through Hosea's marriage relationship that man is corrupted by sin. During this time period, both the northern and southern kingdoms were experiencing economic development and prosperity. However, the hearts of the people had drifted away from God. People were worshipping foreign gods, the towns were filled with idolatry, and the immoral behavior that accompanied idolatry was widespread.

In the midst of this situation, the Lord gave Hosea a prophecy. Look at verse 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.’”** The prophet Hosea was given a surprising command by the Lord: marry a woman who has committed adultery and become a family. Hosea probably couldn't believe his ears, and must have been shocked when he heard this word from God. Adultery is the act of having sexual relations outside a marriage relationship, and it is clearly prohibited in the Ten Commandments given by God, “You shall not commit adultery.” In Leviticus 20:10, it was considered such a serious crime that it carried the death penalty. If a person was a priest, he was forbidden to marry someone who had committed adultery. And yet, Hosea received a word from God that he was to marry an adulteress and become a family.

The reason God gave for this command was that **“the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord.”** The kingdom of Israel was enjoying economic expansion, but both the king and the people were turning away from the Creator of all things to worship foreign gods and idols. The king carried favor with foreign nations for political and economic gain, and he also took wives from abroad, which resulted in the introduction of foreign gods to Israel. The people became economically prosperous, but in exchange, they left the God who had guided them up till then. Instead, they worshipped the gods of other countries, which sometimes involved performing sexual rituals. So you could say the people of Israel were both spiritually and sexually depraved.

Hosea married Gomer and they had three children together. But even after they had kids, Hosea 2 says Gomer left him for another man. How brokenhearted and grieved Hosea must have been that his wife left him and his children. But in Hosea chapter 3, the God told Hosea to love his wife. Why would God command Hosea to do something like this?

Often, the Bible describes the relationship between God and Israel as a marriage relationship. Isaiah 54:5 says, “For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his

name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called." And Ezekiel 16:8 describes God as a bridegroom and Israel as a bride when it says, "When I passed by you again and saw you, behold, you were at the age for love, and I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your nakedness; I made my vow to you and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Lord God, and you became mine." In the New Testament, God is represented as the bridegroom and the Israelites as the bride. In the New Testament, God and the church are also depicted as a bridegroom and bride. Ephesians 5:21-33, which is often read at weddings, is a perfect example of this relationship. God sees his relationship with man as a very intimate one, like a marriage between a man and a woman.

God uses Hosea and Gomer's marriage to paint a picture of the state of God's relationship with the people of Israel. God is full of devotion and love for Israel, but the people are turning their backs on him, leaving him for other gods. And God is painfully heartbroken and grieved because of this. However, God uses Hosea and Gomer's marriage to show how he continues to love his people. How painful it must have been for Hosea. But through this painful relationship, Hosea was able to experience firsthand how corrupted people are by sin, and how much God still loves them.

God is love. And God's love is as exclusive as a marriage relationship, there is no room for anything else in that love. But the people of Israel are in a state of unfaithfulness, forgetting their marriage-like covenant with God. The Lord, out of His infinite love, is trying to show through the relationship between Hosea and Gomer that people are corrupted by sin.

I have also experienced that marriage, especially, reveals the ways that I am corrupted by sin. I have a tendency to want to research and know everything, and whenever I have the impulse to find something out, I immediately open my smartphone or computer to look it up. However, I have sometimes consulted my smartphone in the middle of having dinner with my wife or spending time with her, or even in the middle of an important discussion. When I do that, she gets angry with me, which is natural, of course. When we're spending time together as a couple, my wife wants me to put aside other things and be present with her, but I get distracted by other things. This was damaging to our relationship and important conversations. I was trying to satisfy my pride, and get satisfaction through my desire for knowledge. Whenever I see myself failing to be truly present with my wife, I'm reminded that I have a problem, I am corrupted by sin.

Through Hosea's marriage relationship, God is showing us the reality that we are in rebellion against God, walking in the way we want to walk, and are corrupted by sin. We have fallen away from the marriage-like, covenantal, intimate unity that God desires with us. What happened because of the Fall? In Genesis, Adam and Eve separated themselves from God's love, and sin entered the world, and we have inherited their corruption.

Man's fall into sin resulted in suffering, hardness of heart, emptiness, and injustice. And then, it resulted in death. Our sin is not just a personal problem, but it also has a negative impact on our neighbors and the community around us. Shouldn't we take seriously the fact that we are corrupted by sin?

So what is God's response to these people who have been corrupted by sin in light of his boundless love?? Let's look at verses 4 and 5. **"And the Lord said to him, 'Call**

his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel.” Hosea and Gomer had a baby boy, and God told them to name him Jezreel. The name Jezreel means ‘God sows.’ Jezreel is also a large plain in the northern part of the Kingdom of Northern Israel. It was a place where the soil was rich and nutritious, and yielded a lot of food. So why did God command this name? The reason he gives is this: **“for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel.”** Jehu was the king of the northern kingdom of Israel in the days before Hosea was born.

Jehu is described in more detail in 2 Kings chapters 9 and 10. Jehu was identified by a prophet as the next king of Israel during a time when the people of Israel had turned away from the Lord to worship the pagan god Baal. Baal worship was brought into the kingdom of Israel by Jezebel, a Gentile queen who married king Ahab. Jehu built a fortress in the land of Jezreel, overthrew King Ahab and his family, and became king himself. Jeroboam, the king of Israel in the time of Hosea, was a descendant of Jehu. However, Jehu's descendants also practiced idolatry and fell away from their God. By naming Hosea's son Jezreel, God was declaring that the northern kingdom of Israel would be destroyed.

Then, Hosea had another child. **“6 She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, ‘Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. 7 But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen.”** They had a baby girl, and the Lord told them to name her Lo-ruhamah. In the Hebrew language, ‘lo’ is the word for negation, or ‘no,’ combined with ‘racham,’ which means ‘to love’ or ‘to pity.’ By naming her this, the Lord is proclaiming that he would not love or have mercy on the northern kingdom of Israel. Verse 7 says he will have mercy on the southern kingdom of Judah, that he will rescue them. However, God declares that He will not rescue them by giving them military power, such as bows, swords, horses, and horsemen. The barometer of a country's prosperity in this time period was whether it had a strong military and economic power. These were the things that kings and people wanted for their country. However, God declared that he would not use these things to rescue his people. After this, the kingdom of Judah was indeed able to survive for a little while. However, the kingdom of Judah also turned away from God by worshipping foreign idols, and was overthrown by a huge empire called Babylon, and the people were taken into captivity.

Next, look at verse 8 and 9. **“8 When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. 9 And the Lord said, ‘Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.”** A new baby boy was born to Hosea and Gomer. The Lord commanded them to name him ‘Lo Ammi,’ which means ‘not my people.’ Through Hosea's son's name, God gave a very strong word of rejection to the people of Israel, that they were not his people and he was not their God.

In fact, the northern kingdom of Israel was later besieged by the Assyrians, and it collapsed. 2 Kings 17 tells us the detailed story. The book of 2 Kings clearly states that the reason why Israel collapsed was because the people had sinned and worshipped foreign idols, turning away from the love of God. The people of Israel were taken captive by the Assyrians, and it was because they turned away from the Lord and continued to worship idols that he brought them under the control of an idolatrous people.

The Lord judged the people of Israel in a shocking way, allowing the country to be destroyed. Was it the Lord God's will to destroy the people of Israel? Yes, the Lord God did destroy the people and nation. But God says this in chapter 11 verse 8, **"How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender."**

God's thoughts toward Israel have not changed. The people of Israel worshipped idols and turned away from God, so God judged them. But then he says to Israel that his heart is still warm and tender, and he cannot help but have compassion on them.

God judges people precisely because of his boundless love. His judgment is for turning our hearts back to him, that we might love him again. This is what the New Testament letter to the Hebrews says. **"And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.'"** God judges people precisely because of his boundless love.

When I was a child, I didn't know the Lord yet, but I was disciplined by my parents and by my preschool teachers. When I was in preschool, I hated naptimes. I was the only kid who couldn't sleep at all, while everyone around me fell asleep easily. One day, I was bored because no one would talk to me or play with me during nap time, so I ran out of the school and went home while everyone else was asleep (I had a house within walking distance). I thought I would find my mother at home, but she was at work and there was no one at home.

I was only 4 years old at the time, so I suddenly realized I was alone and started to cry. As I was huddled in front of the door of my house, the preschool school teacher approached, wearing a look of both concern and anger on her face. I was taken back to the school, crying the whole way.

I was severely scolded by my principal, my teacher, and my parents, as this was the first time something like this had happened in the history of preschool. I was suspended for a week, and my parents punished me with a week without snacks, which was very painful for me as a child. But because of this, I decided to quit trying to escape from the preschool. It was also a time when I felt the love of my parents and my teachers for me. I received judgment for what I had done, but it was so that I could be disciplined, that I would return to the love of my parents and grow as a person.

God is love, but God is also holy and good. Therefore, he must judge people's sin. But for those of us who are loved by God, God's judgment is used to admonish us and cause us to become people full of love for God. We are sinners. But for those who trust in God, in Christ, we are spared from the judgment of eternal death, and are granted forgiveness for all our sins, past, present and future. However, we must earnestly confront our own sin. Out of love, God will discipline us, which may at times feel painful like having a part of your heart surgically removed. But the discipline will change you into a person who loves God more deeply.

Finally, even though we are fallen and receive judgment for our sin, because of his boundless love, God brings sinners into his covenant. Let's look at verses 10 and 11. **"10 Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are**

not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.' **11 And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.**" After God said he will have no mercy on them, and that they are no longer his people, he says this.

First, he says that even though they are about to receive judgment, the people of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. This increase in number is a word of blessing.

When God created man, he gave a command accompanied by a blessing, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth..." And then when Abraham was declared righteous because of his faith, God said, "**And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'"** (Genesis 15:5). God is already planning to bless the people on whom he is about to send judgment. "**And in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'"** After this promise, Israel will be invaded by Assyria and destroyed, and the people will be taken into captivity. In the land of the Assyrians, **where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' it shall be said to them, 'Children of the living God.'** In other words, they will be recognized as members of God's family.

Lastly, let's look at verse 11. "**11 And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.**" God says the people of Israel and Judah would be gathered together, and that they would go up out of the land under one head. What does this mean?

After about 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the people of Judah were allowed to return to Jerusalem by Cyrus, the king of Persia. However, this was not the case for the people of the kingdom of Israel. After the occupation, the people of Israel were forced to move to various different areas, and they intermarried with different ethnic groups. The people of Israel were never able to return to their land. So why did this God tell Hosea this prophecy?

God says this in Hosea chapter 2:19-20. He is speaking to Hosea's wife, but it seems that He is also speaking to Israel. "**19 And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. 20 I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.**" How amazing that God could say to Gomer and the people of Israel that he would make a covenant with them after they had committed the sin of adultery. The Israelites would once again be restored to fellowship with the Lord God and be rescued.

This is a declaration that God will bring sinners into his covenant because of his love for them, but how, exactly, does God bring sinners into His covenant? This is what God said to Hosea. Let's look at Hosea 11:1. "**When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.**" This verse reminds us of the Exodus, when God rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. In Hosea's time, the kingdom of Israel did not trust God, and instead sought military assistance from Egypt, where they had been enslaved in the past.

As a result of their sins, the people of the northern kingdom of Israel were taken into captivity by Assyria, and the people of the southern kingdom of Judah were taken into captivity by Babylon. But Matthew, the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, sees the words of Hosea 11:1 being fulfilled by the true Israel, who was both God and man, who delivered people from slavery and captivity to sin, which Egypt represented. Matthew 2:14-15 **“14 And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt 15 and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’”** That person is our Savior, Jesus Christ. God atoned for the sins of people by sending Jesus to die on the cross. And out of His boundless love, He brought sinners into the covenant.

The children born to Hosea and Gomer were given names that emphasized the judgment of God: Jezreel, Lo-ruhama, and Lo-ammi. You could say that they were victims of the fall of the kingdom of Israel into sin. But God loved those children as their Father in heaven. He loved them so much that even though they had sinned, he nurtured them and brought them into his covenant. And he made a covenant with us through his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who atoned for our sin on the cross.

Even though he could have punished us for our sin, because of His boundless love, God welcomed us into His covenant. He accomplished this through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who atoned for our sins by his death on the cross. Because of God's infinite love, forgiveness and deep fellowship with God are offered to us through the life of Jesus. Let's hear the words of redemption and forgiveness spoken by God through the prophet Hosea, repent of our sins and rebellion, praise God for forgiving us, and be transformed day by day into those who love God deeply and respond to his love.