

NT Reading: John 4:7-26

OT Reading and Sermon Text: Hosea 1:1-2:1

Having concluded our exposition of the Word of God in the book of James and the advent season, I would like for us to turn our attention to the Old Testament through the prophet Hosea. There has been a movement in modern Christianity, really since the 20th Century to pay less attention to the Old Testament and focus on the New Testament. I have my suspicions as to why – one of which I suspect is because New Testament Greek is an easier language to associate with English, as opposed to Old Testament Hebrew; another is perhaps that we can trace our civilizations, political histories, and ecclesiastical histories to the apostles and their clerical descendants.

We see this in the Roman Catholic Church, of course, with their appeal to Peter as the beginning of the succession of the Bishops of Rome, or popes. We also see it in the Coptic Church, begun in Africa, and their appeal to the Evangelist St. Mark as the first bishop of Alexandria, or the first Coptic Orthodox Pope. I can recall as a Baptist being instructed that the Baptist church is not a Protestant church, but predates even the Catholic Church, with an appeal to John the Baptist. As Presbyterians we look to the apostolic council of Jerusalem in 50AD as a model for church government and administration.

In all of these cases, it's less clear how our conception of "the church" is connected with the Israelite concept than it is with the New Testament model. Some have even gone so far modernly to not just distinguish between the two, but to separate them entirely from one another into their own unique dispensations – the biological nation of Israel on its own path toward salvation, and the Christian Church claiming its own. A more crass analogy would be to the "Choose Your Own Adventure" books of the 1980s and 1990s, in which the reader can determine the course of the story through choices. "You're the Star of the Story!" they exclaim. Twenty or thirty different dispensations, I mean, endings.

However, as an introduction to Hosea and really an introduction to the approach of the Old Testament, You are NOT the Star of the Story. The star of the story is Christ – easily seen in the New Testament, yes; and easy to trace our ecclesiastical histories back to him; yes. But Christ is the star of the Old Testament just as much as he is the New. Without going into an entire history of orthodox covenant theology, it suffices to say at this point, that Christ knew what he was saying in Luke 24 when he told his disciples, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: EVERYTHING must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms," – literally, the entire Old Testament. Then Jesus opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures and said to them, "Thus it is written," or more grammatically precise, "In this manner is the Old Testament inscriptured," or even to imply, "The whole point of the Old Testament is this: that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,

and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to ALL NATIONS, beginning from Jerusalem.”¹

Jesus Christ is the star of the Old Testament story. Its whole purpose is to reveal through him God’s redemptive plan for all nations. In certain styles of modern dance music—think club music—there is a deliberate formula of a long build-up of increasing intensity of the music, rhythmically adding voices, slowly increasing in volume and pitch, while simultaneously muting the lower, or foundational, frequencies, subdividing the beat into faster and faster repetitions with more and more tension – then a deliberate pause – and then, “the bass drops” with all the satisfaction of harmonic and melodic resolution. It’s actually a concept older than modern dance music – think Bach’s 1st Cello Suite, Tchaikovsky’s 1812 Overture, or Beethoven’s 5th Symphony. The “bass drops” and the tension releases in the conclusion and resolution of these songs to the listener’s satisfaction.

The Old Testament is the long build up unto the consummate long-expected “bass drop” – the consummate resolution to the tension between us and God found in Jesus Christ. And he alone is the satisfaction of the church – both in the Old Testament and in the New.

All of this is to say as we read the Old Testament we do not look at the nation of Israel, and pray to God, “I thank you that I am not like these other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.”² No, dear church, we are no better than those wandering, grumbling, murdering, adultering, thieving, lying, idolatrous Israelites.

And yet.

We see in the death and resurrection of Christ – the firstfruit of the resurrection – repentance for the forgiveness of all of these sins in his name for all nations.

Keep this in mind as we look through the Book of Hosea, where we see the prophecies of well-deserved indictment and punishment for this adulterous people – the bride of Christ.

The people of God described as his bride is not unique to the New Testament. Jeremiah 31:32 describes God as being a husband to the people of Israel; Isaiah 54 says, “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. For the LORD has called you like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast off.” Ezekiel 16 describes God’s covenant in matrimonial language.

¹ For more in-depth exposition of Luke 24, see Timothy Brindle, *The Unfolding* (Philadelphia: Lamp Mode Publishing, 2017), 13-38

² Luke 18:11

How can this be? Just last week we saw God describe his people Israel as his firstborn son – his firstfruits – now he is calling his people Israel his bride? For that matter, how are we the sons and daughters of God, with our Elder Brother Christ, and yet corporately as a church also the bride of Christ? Since we're talking about it, how in the world is the Son of God also called "Everlasting Father"? We'll see God refer to Israel as both his bride and his son in the Prophet Hosea even.

This is a very interesting topic that could be its own series of discussions – but trust that these relational descriptions are not borne out confusion – for God is not the author of confusion.³ Neither does it suffice to explain these heavenly relationships as metaphors or analogies of our own earthly relationships. God's language is analogical, in the sense that he must condescend to speak to us so we can process and understand his eternally powerful Words; but God does not look at our imperfect familial relationships first and then decide to employ those relationships as analogies for his own. No, God has established the consummate relationships between him and his people, and our marriages, parentages, sonships, daughterships, brother- and sisterhoods, and even our employment relationships, and relationships as subjects to the magistrate; these relationships WE exercise as imperfect metaphors for the perfect relationships God has revealed through his Word, especially the eternal Word – Jesus Christ.

So as we look at Hosea, there's no need to conceal the spoiler. Spoiler alert: Hosea the prophet's marriage to the whore Gomer is an analogy of Christ's marriage to his church. We don't need to wait until Hosea 14 to reveal in cinematic drama that we were the prostitute all along, but through Christ we are made pure and holy, shall blossom like the lily, and shall be known throughout the world.

In fact, understanding this up front helps us appreciate the mercy and grace given to us, the Unfaithful Bride of Christ.

Like Gomer, we were brought into marriage out of whoredom – forsaking the true husband, the LORD, for idols; making our desires superior to the law of God; sitting on our own Mount Sinai and telling God and his creation, "Thou shalt not interfere with my authentic self."

And just as we see the redemption of Gomer out of Hosea's marriage to a prostitute, we see the interplay of opposites in her children. There's longstanding debate about the legitimacy of the children of Hosea, especially about two of them. We know that Gomer's sin did not cease upon her marriage to Hosea; and it appears that at least in her second and third child, they are not explicitly nor implicitly described as the fruit of Hosea. This makes the contrasts we will see even more striking.

Gomer's first child Jezreel was called as such to warn the nation of Israel their destruction was coming, and it would be in the valley so-named. The Jezreel valley was a

³ 1 Corinthians 14:33

place of encampment, rest, and healing; a fertile valley of great produce.⁴ Jezebel, you might recall, killed the vintner Naboth of Jezreel because King Ahab desired his vineyard so much so he could plant his own produce. However, in Jehu's day it became the site of slaughter. At God's command, Jehu destroyed the people of Ahab and the prophets of Baal in the valley of Jezreel; but here in Hosea we see that God is determined to punish the house of Jehu for this slaughter – not because they carried out his commands, but because the slaughter was done in idolatry.

Jehu did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam – that idolatrous king who divided the united Israel and warred against his own people; he was not careful to walk in the law of the LORD, the God of Israel with all his heart. He did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to sin.⁵ In Jehu, there was outward obedience, but there was still inward idolatry. His obedience to slaughter was therefore tainted with sin. John Calvin compares Jehu to King Henry VIII, “who, when he saw that he could not otherwise shake off the yoke of the Roman Antichrist than by some disguise, pretended great zeal for a time: he afterwards raged cruelly against all the godly, and doubled the tyranny of the Roman Pontiff: and such was Jehu.”⁶

So Jezreel, the place of healing and restoration, became a place of slaughter and a place of judgment, to end Israel's claim to royalty for their sin.

Gomer's second child, a daughter named Lo-ruhama, continues God's pronouncements of judgment against the northern kingdom of Israel. Indeed Northern Israel was not given any mercy when they were conquered by the Assyrians in the 9th year of King Hoshea, dragged from their homes into a foreign land, because of their continued idolatry – their unfaithfulness as a bride. They despised the statues of the Lord and his covenant that he made with their fathers, and the warnings that he gave them.⁷

Because of the Judean King Hezekiah's repentance, submission, and pleas to God, Judah would receive a measure of mercy against the Assyrians, the LORD preventing the capture of Jerusalem by wiping out the Assyrian army—not by bow or sword or war or horses or horsemen, but by the angel of the Lord.⁸ But even this mercy was temporary, and they would be captured by the Babylonians 100 years later and sent into exile.

Finally, Gomer's third child, Lo-ammi – Not My People – is the ultimate judgment upon Israel, the unfaithful bride. Because of their sins, God has forsaken Israel – divorcing and disowning them...

⁴ See 1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 8-9; Judges 6; 1 Samuel 29

⁵ 2 Kings 10:28-31

⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin on Hosea, part 2*, “Lecture Second (Hosea 1:3-4)”, <https://christian.net/pub/resources/text/m.sion/cvhos-02.htm> (accessed January 1, 2022).

⁷ 2 Kings 17:6-18

⁸ 2 Kings 19:14-37

And for a time, this seemed to be the case. Israel was conquered; Judea was captured and sent into exile. The prophets feel the pain of this judgment. Later prophets like Isaiah would ask, "How long, O LORD?" would his people be made dull, deaf, and blind to his mercies. Later prophets like Habakkuk would ask, "How long, O LORD, shall I cry for help and you will not hear? Or cry 'Violence!' and you will not save?" Later prophets like Zechariah would ask, "How long, O LORD, will you have no mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah?"

For seven hundred and twenty years they were subject to conquer, captivity, exile, slavery, judgment, vassals to Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman suzerains: Imagine – this is as long a time as today is from 1300.

But yet...

The number of children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured, 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!" 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.⁹

The mercy of the Lord WOULD once again be extended in the proliferation of his people unto all nations – like the sands of the sea! His ownership would be extended once again; rather than being forsaken, they would be his inheritors! And the reputation of Jezreel would be returned as a place of healing and restoration.

But how could God do this? Does he just change his mind? Does he allow justice to be ignored? Was it the case that the Jewish exile and captivity was sufficient to satisfy the wrath of God?

No, no, and no! Israel deserved the wrath of God 720 years after the Assyrian destruction as much as they deserved it then. Israel deserved no mercy, deserved to be disowned, and deserved the judgments of idolatrous slaughter as much in the days of King Herod as they deserved in the days of King Hoshea.

But somehow the unfaithful bride has been restored. Though Eve has sinned, and the first Adam with her, the last Adam¹⁰ has come to restore his bride.

We in our adulterous ways, chasing after the gods of money, personal reputation, power, luxury, influence, popularity, pleasure – chasing after our own personal laws rather than submitting to the eternal legislator of the universe – we deserve judgment; we deserve no mercy; we deserve to be disowned and divorced. You, individually dear brother and sister, and we corporately, O bride of Christ, deserve death for our sins.

⁹ Hosea 1:10-11

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 15:45

But God shows his love for us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.¹¹

Who was it who was consummately shown “No Mercy?” It was Christ on the Cross – an innocent man with no sin who deserved nothing but life, was given death instead. The true firstborn, the only begotten son of God, the consummate firstfruit was consummately shown No Mercy – for our sins, not his own.

Who was it who was consummately forsaken, disowned, divorced from God? It was Christ on the Cross – “My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me?!? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest!”¹² “How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? Remember how short my time is! For what vanity you have created all the children of man! What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?”¹³ The true son of God was called Not My People – for our sins, not his own.

Who was it who was consummately judged for the idolatrous wickedness of Israel? Who was punished for the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel? It was Christ on the Cross – “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was pierced – for OUR transgressions; he was crushed – for OUR iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace; and with his stripes we return to Jezreel for healing and restoration by his blood.”¹⁴

Through Christ’s assumption of “no mercy,” we have been given the greatest mercies of God, and through Christ he will cause the number of his people to be as the sands of the seas – innumerable and spread to all nations.

Through Christ’s assumption of “not my people,” we are restored as Children of God, and the Bride of Christ. Though an unfaithful people, the consummate bridegroom will not abandon his bride – and better yet will continue to be faithful as we are sanctified unto the conformity of his image. And better yet, still, we enjoy the righteousness imputed unto us during this process of sanctification!

Through Christ’s assumption of our punishment, we have eternal life.

With this in mind, how can you or I go on in our adulterous ways in light of this? How can we continue to pretend that we are God and his world should submit to our

¹¹ Romans 5:8

¹² Psalm 22:1-2

¹³ Psalm 89:46-48

¹⁴ Isaiah 53:3-5; see also 1 John 1:7

preferences and affirm our identities? How can we continue to idolize how the world perceives us rather than how God sees us? Why do we, like Jehu, outwardly obey the Word of God in one particular instance, but then turn around and deliberately disobey him by preferring our desires over the desires of God?

We do because, while the saving faith given us by Christ is perfect and unfailing, our own man-made faith is prone to wander. And we need to repent of this unfaith. We are no better on our own than Israel; the only difference is they had to look forward to a redeemer. We, like the woman at the well, have met Jesus Christ; we worship what we know; and though called out for our adultery are also called into the presence of God to worship him in Spirit and in truth.¹⁵ This is no small thing!

As we limp along this path of sanctification – as an unfaithful bride being purified for glory by the perfect saving faith of Christ – remember, yes, that your sins have been forgiven in Christ; but let us look to our bridegroom as the consummate satisfaction and the consummate object of our faith.

He has shown us how to be the perfect bridegroom and what to expect of a bride; he has shown us true brotherhood; so as he commanded us, let us bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Do not prize your reputation over your love for your spouse or neighbor;¹⁶ Encourage and lift each other up, just as you are doing. Be at peace among yourselves; admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak and be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in our bridegroom Jesus Christ for you. Do not quench the spirit; do not despise the prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good, and abstain from every form of evil.¹⁷

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ

¹⁵ John 4:7-26

¹⁶ Galatians 6:1-3

¹⁷ 1 Thessalonians 5:11-22