

**NT Reading: Revelation 21:9-14****OT Reading and Sermon Text: Hosea 2:1-23**

Since it's been a few weeks since we've visited the book of Hosea, you'll bear with me as I recapitulate sort of the themes we dealt with then, as well as remind you about our approach to the Old Testament.

As we look at the Old Testament, we must remember that it was revealed to its authors by God with Christ in mind. We would do an injustice in our way of thinking about God's omnipotence and omniscience if we were to think, for example, that God took a break after the prophet Malachi for a few hundred years, assessing the situation, and devising how in the world he could fix the problem Israel got themselves into. God did not arrive at an epiphany in 5 BC and say, "I've got just the thing!"

No, the Christ is not only the central point of history, the Christ has been at the center of God's eternal calculus with his creation. Jesus Christ is just as much the star of the Old Testament as he is the star of the New Testament. You may not notice it at first – you may think the story of David is an inspiration for you to conquer your own Goliaths, but it is really about God's anointed crushing the skull of the scaly, serpent-like enemy. You're more like the Israelites in that story, too afraid to face the foe and standing on the sidelines.<sup>1</sup>

This approach and realization is not depressing, O Existentialist, who insist on your identity and self-esteem being elevated and insist on being the star of the story whenever possible. No, realizing the beauty of this – that **we are not left on our own**, but we have a protector, a savior, a redeemer – should spur us more and more to joy. Every worldview in some way tries to tell you at the end of the day, "you are the star of the story." But we know in our heart of hearts how tragically rotten that production would be. The Gospel reminds us the Christ – not us – is the star of the story.

And so we saw in Hosea 1. The prophet gives the punchline up front: "Go marry a whore because Israel has acted the whore when they are supposed to be my faithful bride. Show them in this analogy, Hosea, what they are really acting like and through her offspring show them they deserve no mercy and to be forsaken, condemned for their idolatrous adultery."

But who did God have in mind when revealing himself through the prophet Hosea? It was Christ all along who endured the punishment and divorce that God's people deserved. And it is through Christ – Immanuel, God With Us – that we as God's people are reconciled unto him.

So we are reminded of this up front in Hosea 2: "Brothers and Sisters, you are God's people and mercy is shown to you."

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<sup>1</sup> See Timothy Brindle, *The Unfolding*, Philadelphia: Lamp Mode Publishing, 2017, 83ff

But to appreciate this more fully, and to warn us against our own sin, Hosea brings us before the court.

I'm afraid the English verb translated in verse 2 "Plead with" can be inferred incorrectly, inferred to be less serious than what is going on. The Hebrew verb<sup>2</sup> is extremely serious, and it has to do with bringing a legal charge against someone. We understand a "plea" deal in our own legal system, which can be inferred as a defendant "pleading" for a lesser charge; or we understand when the judge asks "How do you plead?" The defendant is being asked to plea for innocence or guilt. But it's more technically and more historically accurate to call any presentation to the court, including the prosecution, a "plea".<sup>3</sup>

The sense of what is being introduced here is NOT a command to beg earnestly with the whore Gomer. No, the sense of what is being introduced is a command to prosecute the prostitute. The charges of sin are not just frowned upon by society. Our sins are not simply acts looked upon in disapproval. No, these charges of sin against Gomer and against us are literal crimes and are worthy of prosecution.

We should NOT infer this introduction in a way modern dictionaries define "plea" – to make an emotional appeal<sup>4</sup> – but rather read this introduction as, "Prosecute your mother, prosecute her! For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. And let her turn aside<sup>5</sup> -- וְתָסֵר -- her whoreings from her face, and let her turn aside her adulteries from between her breast."

The very action of eye contact is a complex thing. It's a very intimate thing, can be a very emotional thing; eye can communicate in ways that words can't. It involves a face-to-face confrontation. It can also become very awkward for introverts like me. But that is what is being communicated here.

The unfaithful bride is making eye-contact with her sin, welcoming her sin, embracing her sin, to which she is charged, "turn your face and your whole body away from this sin," lest you be sentenced to the wilderness – completely exposed and vulnerable – left on your own to be the star of your story – with no protector, no savior, no redeemer.

God continues the prosecution: The sin of mankind – beginning with Adam – was so serious, you understand, that it deserved a death sentence. Adam and Eve were sentenced to the prison of death, and so their children were likewise born in the prison of death, stained with the same sin of their parents. When Eve and Adam went a-whoring after

<sup>2</sup> רִיב – strive, contend; in a legal sense, find fault, conduct a legal case.

<sup>3</sup> This is still litigation in which the plaintiff – the accusing party – presents his or her pleas before the court, but it was historically the case this also applied to civil litigation. "Pleas of the Crown" were prosecutions in the name of the king (or queen) in British Common Law against criminal acts.

<sup>4</sup> See Dictionary.com, TheFreeDictionary.com, Google's use of Oxford Dictionaries, etc.

<sup>5</sup> The verb וְתָסֵר is explicitly in the Jussive mood, which is to say what follows is what the speaker is communicating *ought to be* done.

other gods – namely to make themselves as gods – their children suffered the consequences of their sin, as well.

So this drama of the cosmic treason in our first parents is being played out in the nation of Israel. The whore Gomer – Israel – the unfaithful bride has tainted her offspring. We see this played out in our first parents, of course, but God is reminding his people they did it again.

Despite being divorced from God at the Garden of Eden, God yet gave mercy and covenanted again with his people. Which covenants his people broke again and again and again. What I like about Hosea is that God uses physical realities to illustrate what is going on. “Hosea, get it through your thick skull, and through the thick skulls of the people of Israel: you all have turned away from me so you could look at and embrace sin face to face. Go marry a prostitute in front of all of Israel so you have a little bit of an idea of how my relationship is going with my unfaithful bride.”

“My bride has turned away from the creator of all things to false gods who pretend to provide food, water, clothing, reputation, pleasure, and comfort. My people have compromised their fidelity in the face of other gods – yielding my place as their husband because these false gods pretend to ridicule me; betraying my husbanddom at the first prospect of pleasure or power.”

“But I will not abandon my bride, Hosea. I will protect her. I will make it so that it is harder for her to sin, and I will cause her more and more to be wholly renewed after the image of God, enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.<sup>6</sup>

“She will come to realize that whatever pleasures she found in false gods, profaned for the glory of idols, have been created by the one true God and are much sweeter as HE has consecrated them for HIS glory – whether in food, drink, property, or pleasure.”<sup>7</sup>

What God is promising through the prophet Hosea is not just redemption, but sanctification – becoming more like Christ.

But how often does this sanctification come out of shame? We can relate, I hope, in our microcosmic lives how when what we hold as precious is removed from us, how much more reliant we are upon the Lord; we can relate that the shame of our sin becoming public moves us to humiliation and repentance.

What God is illustrating here is certainly applicable for our own personal lives – rejoice in humiliation and loss and let it move you unto a reliance upon and imitation of Christ. Let it cause you to turn aside your sin from your face and turn aside your sin from between your breasts.

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<sup>6</sup> Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 35: “What is Sanctification?”

<sup>7</sup> Hosea 2:6-13

But God is also illustrating the grander story of redemptive history: How God promises to prosecute his wrath against sin – stripping the unfaithful bride of all comfort, leaving her thirsty, stripped naked in shame for all to see. There God will lay waste to the profane and send it to the grave.<sup>8</sup>

Yet out of this utter shame and destruction, God’s mercy on his people will be revealed. The bride will be enticed, brought forth anew unto true and holy bread and wine.<sup>9</sup>

This happy ending is not of our own doing, dear church. Remember you are not the star of this story. Remember who it was who was stripped naked, and exposed in public shame – hanging on the cross. Remember who it was who was parched – who said, “I thirst,” and who was given vinegar instead of wine. Remember who it was who was cast out into the wilderness as the scapegoat – with the sins of Israel placed upon his back. Remember who it was who was presented by Pilate in public shame, “Ecce Homo! Behold the Man!” and remember when the people replied, pleading with the judge, “Prosecute him! Prosecute him! Crucify him! Crucify him!” Remember who it was, whose body was bruised, flogged, and pierced, and whose blood was drained – the bread of life broken and the true vine trampled and poured out by God’s wrath.

Remember, O Church, it is through Christ, shown no mercy and forsaken – divorced from God – on the cross, that we are restored out of our adultery, out of our shame and misery, and made more and more like our consummate bridegroom.

In Chapter 2, Hosea doesn’t just give us a preview of the central point of redemptive history – the death on the cross. He also gives us a preview of the wedding feast of the lamb and his bride.

The beauty of our redemption, brothers and sisters, is that we are not purchased out of our bondage to sin only to be emancipated and left on our own in our own wilderness – with no protector, no savior, no redeemer.

The beauty of our redemption is that we are purchased out of our shame, misery, and humiliation, and brought into the most intimate, affined, and familial relationship that is sustained for eternity. Out of our unrighteousness and condemnation, he will betroth us to him forever in righteousness, and in justice, and in steadfast love, and in mercy. He will betroth us to him in faithfulness and we shall **know** the LORD. And yes, the verb know in Hosea 2:20 is the same verb in Hebrew that is used to describe marital relations.

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<sup>8</sup> Hosea 2:8-13

<sup>9</sup> The word in used for “wilderness” in Hosea 2:14 (מִדְבָּר) does not necessarily nor primarily imply “desolation,” though it can as in 2:3. When used in a positive sense, it has implications of pastureland where the sheep graze and are fattened. It can also be used in reference to the place of manna. The contrast in Deuteronomy 8:15-16 is in this way, similar to the contrast of Hosea 2:3 and 2:14. Cf. John 6:31 and Psalm 78:18-20.

If you study Biblical Hebrew for any period of time you come to realize there is an intense amount of wordplay – rhymes, puns, innuendos even. The first man, Adam, for example is not just named for the Hebrew word for “man” – ADAM (אָדָם) – but also from whence he was brought forth, ADAMAH (אֲדָמָה), the Hebrew word for dust or ground. In the book of Judges, when Ehud stabs the very fat man, King Eglon (which name itself has a bovine pun contained in it), the English translation is, “and the hilt went in after the blade and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not pull the sword out of his belly; and the dung came out.” but in Hebrew it might as well be a hip-hop lyric:

*vayabo gam hannisav  
ahar hallahav  
vayyisgor hahelev  
B'ad hallahav  
Ki-lo salaph haherev  
M'bithnow vayetzah  
hapar sh'donah*

The last word – פָּרְשֵׁי דֹן (parsh'don) – translated as entrails or dung in English, is only used once in the Old Testament, but it contains another bovine pun,<sup>10</sup> implies violent destruction,<sup>11</sup> and contains an allusion to justice.<sup>12</sup> So the Hebrew wordplay is not just a graphic description of Eglon's death, but the storyteller is concluding the story by also communicating with great humor, “and the fat cow was justly condemned to a violent despoiling.”

What's my point?

I want to make sure I am communicating to you the magnitude of the intimacy and affinity of our relationship with Christ, that is not perfectly communicated in direct translation.

When God says “I will have mercy (*racham*) on No Mercy (*Lo Ruchama*),” he is also showing the deep familial intimacy of the **womb – the *rechem***.

When God says, “I will say to “Not My People” – “*Lo 'Ammi*” – you are my people – ‘*ammi*’ – he is showing through words the familial intimacy of complete togetherness, complete with-ness as his kinsmen.<sup>13</sup>

We see this togetherness, this with-ness, consummated in our bridegroom, whose name **IM-anu-EL – the WITH-US GOD** – shows us how dearly God treats his people and fulfils his promise in the real star of the story, Jesus Christ – our protector, our savior, our redeemer.

<sup>10</sup> פָּר – young bull, steer

<sup>11</sup> [שָׁדַד] – deal violently with, despoil, devastate, ruin

<sup>12</sup> דֵּין – judgment, condemnation

<sup>13</sup> The noun אָמ (people, nation, kinsman) is closely related to the preposition אִתְּ (with, together)

As we saw in our New Testament reading, when John views the marriage feast of the lamb and beholds the Bride of Christ, he sees the bow, the sword, and war abolished from the land. He sees the bride lay down in safety<sup>14</sup> in the great, high walls with twelve gates and twelve angels – inscribed with the twelve tribes of Israel and founded upon the twelve apostles of the lamb. **If your faith is in Christ**, you are that people. You enjoy now and look forward to an eternity in consummate, complete and perfect togetherness – **US WITH GOD**.

The application of this beautiful reality is literally infinite, brothers and sisters. How can we, for example, sow division within the bride, knowing how our bridegroom has unified us unto him? How can we show partiality to one another, when our bridegroom has brought us in togetherness and with-ness unto himself? How in the world can we seek after pleasure in false gods, idols, pride, lust, when we have been redeemed and are owned by the one true God? How can we not show compassion to the widow, the orphan, and the sojourner, when Christ has shown us compassion when we were that widow, that orphan, that wanderer? How can we abandon a brother or sister to the great and terrifying wilderness of hunger and despair when Christ has brought us into the wilderness with heavenly manna, the bread of life?<sup>15</sup>

Seeing how Christ has loved us should move us to repentance when we have not loved one another in that same manner. And we should rejoice in the chastening the Word of God brings to us. And we should rejoice further that we know **we are not on our own** – the star of our own story – as we limp along in this path of sanctification.

If your faith is not in Christ and are not moved to a repentance unto life, you may scoff at this notion and insist on being left within your own wilderness, cursed to be the star of your own story and trust in the false gods of material wealth, power, and reputation for your self-satisfaction and self-joy. I pray that you would be moved to repentance unto life and unto a saving faith in Christ, and that you would be joined together with us as God's people, for the LORD is our God."

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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<sup>14</sup> Hosea 2:18-19

<sup>15</sup> See Deuteronomy 8:15-16