

NT Reading: Titus 2:1-15**OT Reading and Sermon Text: 3:1-5**

The first three chapters of Hosea tell the story of Hosea's interaction with Gomer, and of course we've seen his marriage to her as an analogy of God's relationship with his people, the Children of Israel, his bride, the bride of Christ. We've seen the Word of the Lord pronounce the deserved punishment on the unfaithful bride, but we have also seen how Christ assumed that punishment on behalf of his bride.

Some of you may enjoy studying history; and there's a branch of pseudo-history that is, let's call it "interesting" from a perspective of fiction, but it's absolutely useless, in my opinion, as good study – this rotten branch is called "What If?" history. Some of you may enjoy it – and I'll admit to enjoying the fictional drama of shows like "The Man in the High Castle," which imagines life in post-World War II America after the Japanese and Germans won the war. But some historians take this a bit too seriously, and attempt to draw real historical conclusions upon our current present if one variable in the past had been different?

"What if the South won the Civil War?" for example. "What if Kennedy had survived his assassination attempt?" Some historians take these questions seriously – but they're impossible to answer, and so many times two different people will come to opposite conclusions. "If Kennedy survived," one historian might suppose, "the Vietnam war never would have happened, and faith in our government would not have been lost, and basically we'd live in a utopia."¹

Another historian might assess the situation and conclude the exact opposite – that a full-term Kennedy presidency would have been a nuclear disaster and would have caused the complete destruction of the Democratic party.

Asserting any of these conclusions with any kind of confidence is folly – we just don't know what would have happened. And from an academic perspective, it's pointless to ask. It doesn't matter – the South didn't win the Civil War. It doesn't matter – Kennedy did not survive.

Yet still, as much as I despise "What If?" history from an academic perspective, I still often wonder, "What if Adam assumed the punishment for Eve's unfaithfulness? What if Adam offered himself as a redeemer, rather than a co-conspirator?" At the end of the day, it's pointless to ask these questions. Adam didn't; he sinned along with Eve, and history played out as it did.

But on the other hand, this fundamental question of human history is persistently pondered. We may cry out with a desire for an opposite history, knowing it can never happen, "if only Adam and Eve had obeyed God, things would be perfect – no loss, no

¹ See Robert Dallek, *What Ifs? Of American History*, Berkley, CA: Berkley Books (2003)

suffering, no pain – utter paradise.” Which is a specific way of exclaiming our general longing: “If only things were perfect, then things would be perfect.”

Well, the story of redemptive history IS the answer to these questions. And we see it previewed in the Old Testament in places like Ruth and Hosea. Christ did not act as a co-conspirator with Eve; he has acted as a redeemer. Christ did not abandon the poor, gentile outsider to the gleanings of the field; he acted as a redeemer. Christ did not condemn his unfaithful bride to public shame, nakedness, and death for her idolatrous adultery; Christ acted as a redeemer.

The third chapter of Hosea concludes the story of Gomer and Hosea. The remaining chapters are prophecies of indictment and punishment upon Israel, as well as prophecies of reconciliation. It also summarizes redemptive history concisely in 5 verses, emphasizing the role of the redeemer.

What is “redemptive history”? What is a “redeemer?” Maybe it’s just me, but the term CAN carry with it a feeling of jargon – of Christianese. It’s kind of taken for granted, “Christ is our redeemer!” and when asked what in the world that means, we may reply something like, “well, you know, just what I said, Christ is our redeemer! He’s redeemed us!” Maybe we get a little more sophisticated and say, “He has purchased me!” And we remember the hymn we just sang, “With his blood he purchased me! He sealed my pardon on the cross, paid the debt and made me free!”

This is not a wrong answer. It’s a very right answer, and it’s one reason I love hymns that help us recall doctrine. And if we walk away today understanding THAT Jesus Christ is our redeemer, without a comprehensive understanding of all that means historically and theologically, you do well. But the Word of God does help us to understand how beautiful this reality is, by showing us what it means to be redeemed, and what we’ve been redeemed from.

First of all, a redeemer is not just someone who can afford to buy something. A Biblical redeemer is a very familial thing. The Hebrew word, *ga'al*, has more to do with being a **kinsman** than it has to do with having the ability to buy. We see it used in Exodus 6, when God tells the people of Israel through Moses: “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will REDEEM you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people – *l’ammi* – and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God.”

In Leviticus 25, God introduces the extensive laws pertaining to redemption by saying, “Land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine. For you are strangers and sojourners with me. And in all the country you possess, you shall allow a redemption of the land.”

What follows in Leviticus is a very interesting and practical discourse on private property and the right of redemption – the right of the nearest kinsman to purchase back what

has essentially been put in hock, or pawned, or imprisoned as someone else's. How a person's land, house, and even themselves can be sold for a time, but there shall always be the possibility of your family purchasing the debt to bring you back into the family, made whole and complete. Due to their impoverishment, Jewish people would literally sell themselves as slaves to foreigners – away from the people of God – for the promise of food and water; yet even in this case, it was the right of the slave's kinsman to buy him back into his true family.

The usual valuation of such a slave, we are told in Exodus 21, was thirty pieces of silver.

So Hosea is called to redeem his prostitute wife – not to purchase her as a whore, but to redeem her out of whoredom and brought back into her true family. The price was what amounted to 30 pieces of silver. We see the fifteen shekels in verse 2, of course, but what is more striking about Hosea's redemption is he scraped together all the money he had to pay for half, and then gave of his harvest – his firstfruits – to pay for the other half. Hosea gave according to his means, and beyond his means, of his own accord, begging earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of Gomer—and this, not as we expected, but he gave himself first to the Lord and then by the will of God to Gomer.²

Of course, brothers and sisters, we see the parallels between Hosea and Jesus Christ, who himself was illegitimately sold out for thirty pieces of silver by Judas the betrayer; but who also has given of himself as the consummate firstfruit his own blood on the cross, sealing our redemption, making us free to be with him as his people. Redeeming us with all of himself out of idolatry, out of adultery, out of whoredom – our chasing after other.

First Peter chapter one, reminds us that we were ransomed – redeemed – from the futile or unfruitful ways inherited from your forefathers, not with corruptible things like silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

And in this condensed timeline of redemptive history in Hosea, we see what comes next: the command to not sin, and await the coming of the Lord. In the latter days, we shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness.

Because of our redemption we have been bought out of sin and bought back into our true family. As I mentioned last week, the most beautiful part of this redemption is that we were not bought out slavery only to be left on our own; but we were bought by our kinsman to be returned as God's people into his family.

And in that family, O Church, we are called to be good family members. Redemption is not an abstract theology – there are real, practical applications. As we wait for the coming of the Lord, or as Paul tells Titus in our New Testament reading, as we are

² Cf 2 Corinthians 8

“waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,” what are we to do?

Well, Paul tells us, Jesus redeemed us from lawlessness to be lawful, to be purified for Jesus Christ as his people who are zealous for good works, some of which good works are found throughout Chapter 2 to older men and women, young men, slaves/servants/employees; and to all Paul pronounces this: “renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.”

In other words, as Hosea tells Gomer, you must dwell as mine for many days, you shall not play the whore or belong to another man; so will God also be to us.

There is one “What If?” question in history that is worth considering, because we know what would have happened: “What if Christ had not come?” We would have no redeemer; we would be eternally bound in slavery unto death; eternally playing the whore with no control of our own being. But praise God this couldn’t have happened for the people of God, because God is a God of promises and has kept his promise to give us a redeemer in Christ Jesus.