

The Books of Hosea, Joel, and Amos

Lesson 2: Love Like the Lord's: Redeeming the Unfaithful -- Hosea 3:1-5:15

There is a kind of love that waits for the other person to deserve it. We are all fluent in that love. We give it to people who treat us well, and we withdraw it the moment they do not. It is safe, it is fair, and it is nothing at all like the love of God. In Hosea 3 we are shown a love so different that it has to be commanded, because no human heart would choose it on its own: 'Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress.' Go again. Love her again. Love her precisely where she has wandered.

And then Hosea does the unthinkable. He goes and buys her back. He pays silver and barley to redeem his own wife from the very degradation her unfaithfulness had sold her into. Read that slowly. He purchases the right to love the woman who broke his heart. If you have ever wondered what God thinks of you on your worst day, after your deepest failure, here is your answer, acted out in a marketplace by a heartbroken prophet who would not let his wife go.

But love like the Lord's is never sentimental. The same God who redeems also confronts. In chapters 4 and 5 the tenderness gives way to a courtroom. The Lord has a controversy, a lawsuit, with His people, for there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. Lying, killing, stealing, and adultery break out, and blood touches blood. A people who would not be loved well must now be told the truth plainly, because real love does not flatter sin; it names it.

So this lesson holds two things together that we are always tempted to pull apart: a love that redeems and a holiness that will not pretend. God will pay to bring His people home, and God will not lie to them about what is killing them. He even withdraws for a season, He says, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence,' not because His love failed, but so that, in their distress, they will seek Him early. This is the love that finally meets us at the cross. Come and see how the Lord loves the unfaithful, and let it change how you come home.

Group Discussion: God commanded Hosea, 'love a woman... yet an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel,' and Hosea bought her back at a price. As a group, talk through the difference between a love that waits to be deserved and a love that redeems. How does Hosea's purchase of Gomer point us to the price Christ paid for His church?

Personal Reflection: Hosea paid silver and barley to redeem a wife who had wandered. When you consider that God's love does not wait for you to deserve it but goes looking and pays to bring you home, what changes in how you see yourself and how you return to Him after failure?

Read Hosea 3:1-5:15

Study Questions

1. In Hosea 3:1 God commands Hosea to love Gomer again 'according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel.' What does this command reveal about the nature of God's love, that it must be commanded and is patterned on His own covenant faithfulness?
2. Hosea bought Gomer back at a price rather than abandoning her. In what relationship or situation is God calling you to a costly, redeeming love that does not wait to be deserved, and what holds you back?
3. Hosea 3:4–5 says Israel will abide many days without king, sacrifice, or image, and then 'afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king.' How is this hope of seeking the Lord and 'David their king' fulfilled in Christ rather than in a future earthly throne?
4. After a season of discipline, Israel is pictured returning to 'seek the Lord their God.' What does it look like in your own life to genuinely seek the Lord after a time of straying, and how do you know the difference between true returning and mere regret?
5. In Hosea 4:1 the Lord brings a 'controversy' against His people because there is 'no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.' Why does God treat the absence of the knowledge of God as so serious, and what is the link between knowing God and living rightly?

6. Hosea 4:6 warns, 'my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.' Where do you see a lack of real knowledge of God damaging lives today, including your own, and what will you do to grow in knowing Him?
7. Hosea 4:6 also rebukes the priests: 'thou hast rejected knowledge... seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God.' What does this teach about the responsibility of spiritual leaders and teachers, and the danger of forgetting God's word?
8. Hosea 4:12 and 5:4 speak of a 'spirit of whoredoms' that will not let the people return to God, so that their doings will not 'frame their doings to turn unto their God.' How can sin entangle a heart so that returning becomes hard, and how have you experienced sin's grip on the will?
9. Hosea 5:15 records God saying, 'I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face: in their affliction they will seek me early.' What does this withdrawal teach us about how God's discipline, His holiness, and His redeeming love work together to bring a wayward people to true repentance?
10. Looking back across Hosea 3-5 as a whole, where has the Lord most challenged you, and name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through this picture of a love that both redeems the unfaithful and refuses to flatter sin?

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Ephesians 5:25–27, Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her, a redeeming love that purifies; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20, believers are bought with a price and belong to God; Luke 15:11–24, the father runs to the returning prodigal, redeeming love that does not wait to be deserved; Acts 2:29–36, the promise of ‘David their king’ fulfilled in the reign of the risen Christ; Hebrews 12:5–11, the Lord’s loving discipline aims at our restoration and holiness

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