



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### *MAJORING IN THE MINORS: HOSEA* A MARRIAGE MADE IN HEAVEN

Scripture: Hosea 3:1

June 19, 2005

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#### INTRODUCTION

We have a lot of weddings around here. Not long ago I performed two weddings on the same day! It's always a thrill to hear the music swell and the bride begin her walk down the aisle, arm in arm with her father (or whoever is escorting). I love to watch the smiling, but nervous husband-to-be following every step—eyes brimming with love and anticipation. . .and fright.

Then we get to that part where I ask: “*Who gives this woman to be married to this man?*” One time I got that turned around: “*Who gives this man to be married to this woman?*” It was one of my most embarrassing moments.

A wedding is a joyous celebration of love. It is the holy mystery of two becoming one. . .of beginning life together. . .of commitment to the most unique of all human relationships. Marriage is ordained by God and illustrates his relationship with his people. There is perhaps no greater tragedy than the violation of those sacred vows.

In some of the weddings I have performed, we include the Jewish tradition of breaking a wine glass wrapped in a towel—to symbolize the fragility of marriage.

**[We're going to see that illustrated in Scripture this morning. We're in the Book of Hosea, and I'll give you 60 seconds to find it while I continue to talk.]**

God tells Hosea to find a wife, and tells him ahead of time that she is going to be unfaithful to him. Can you imagine?! She would bear many children, but some of these offspring would be fathered by others. And he knows this going into it.

So we get to that part in the ceremony in which they exchange vows: “*Will you love him, comfort him, honor & keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, be faithful to him as long as you both shall live?*” And the bride answers: “**NO!**”

Nevertheless, in obedience to God, Hosea marries GOMER. THEIR RELATIONSHIP plus HER ADULTERY plus THEIR CHILDREN become a living, prophetic example **to Israel**—who had lost interest in their special relationship with God and had begun chasing after other gods and agendas (e.g.: military more than spiritual might). That was in the early 700's (BC).

It's likewise a message **to us** who easily enough lose interest in spiritual things and begin compromising our Christian lifestyles & values and adopting the ways of the world. We too can be an unfaithful bride!

The Book of Hosea is a love story—real, tragic, true—but one that transcends the tale of a young man and wife. It is a lived-out object lesson of God's love for His people who had been unfaithful. Let's look at it chapter by chapter. .

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## A. Chapter 1

The book opens with God's marriage instructions to Hosea. After Hosea's wedding, children were born. Each was given a name signifying a divine message:

- Ø **Jezreel (son)** == the valley where Israel would be conquered by the Assyrians [vv. 4f]  
Jezreel means *to scatter (dissolve)*.
- Ø **Lo-Ruhamah (daughter)** == "not loved" [v. 6]
- Ø **Lo-Ammi (son)** == "not my people" [vv. 8-9]

## B. Chapter 2

Then Gomer leaves Hosea to pursue her lusts: *"She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them"* [v. 7].

But Hosea—whose name, by the way, means "salvation"—goes after her. He just won't let her go. He finds her. . .redeems her. . .brings her home again:

<sup>14</sup> *"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her."*

<sup>16</sup> *"In that day," declares the LORD, "you will call me 'husband'; you will no longer call me 'master'."*

<sup>19</sup> *"I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion."*

<sup>20</sup> *"I will betroth you in faithfulness. . ."* <sup>23</sup> *I will show my love to the one I called 'NOT MY LOVED ONE'. I will say to those called 'NOT MY PEOPLE', 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"*

## C. Chapter 3

The Lord says to Hosea (and this is our text this morning): *"Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods. . ."* [v.1]

Apparently, Gomer had sold herself into slavery or become the mistress of another man.

Hosea goes out and buys her back: *"So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver. . ."* [v. 2]

That's what it means to be redeemed: to be bought at a price. . .so that you are no longer your own (as Paul says in I Corinthians 6:19-20). Now you belong to Him.

Hosea tells her: *Now you belong to me! "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will live with you."* [v. 3]

With that, she is fully reconciled!

## D. Chapters 4-12

God outlines His case against the people of Israel—how their sins would ultimately cause their destruction and separation from God. Yet even in the midst of this, God is merciful and offers hope. He expresses His infinite love for His people and how He will bless them and restore them (once they repent).

TRANSITION

What is so dramatic about this book is the way it shows God's love, mercy, and compassion. The Old Testament gets a bad rap for being all about God's wrath, anger, and judgment. But His grace is never more evident than in these verses. The price Hosea paid for Gomer's redemption is the Old Testament equivalent to the price Christ paid on the cross for our redemption to buy us back from the slavery of sin.

The message of this book is clear: God will go to any length to redeem & restore. You say, is it possible that God loves too much? Shouldn't He just let them go? **God is the ultimate co-dependent.** [A co-dependent is one who is so attached to someone that they can't let go even when they should—because the addiction is starting to do some serious harm.]

Ø God is addicted to us! He just can't let go!

Ø You say: "This addiction could kill you"

Ø Yes, in fact, it did just that [with the death of His Son on the Cross]!

All so Israel—and you & I—could be restored!

**PPT Slide #8:** Take a look at this photo: DAMAGED / BENT / CREASED / PARTS MISSING / FADED.

**PPT Slide #9:** But look at this: FULLY RESTORED!

This is a project Marcie did in one of her digital imaging classes.

That's what God want to do in each one of us.

Hosea describes GOD's WORK OF RESTORATION in Chapter 2. He does so by means of **six promises**, each beginning with the words "*I will. . .*" This means He takes the initiative. You see, we don't find God. He finds us! Let's look at the promises and see if we can discern a pattern of how God works to restore His people. . . . .

#### I> I WILL ALLURE [v. 14]

God's Holy Spirit woos us, sometimes without our even being aware of it. Sometimes He takes us to a place of barrenness ("desert")—where there are fewer distractions—so that He can speak to us. Remember that God can speak to you in the desert as clearly if not more clearly as in times of prosperity. Maybe our ears are a little more tuned there. Paul says in **Romans 2:4** that "*God's kindness (patience) leads us toward repentance.*" But the final decision is always up to us. God will never force His people to follow Him; but He will try to get us there. He will "*speak kindly to us*".

#### II> I WILL GIVE [v. 15]

The *Valley of Achor* (or *Trouble*) is the site where Achan had sinned way back in Joshua's day. The story is found in **Joshua 7**. The Children of Israel were trying to take possession of the Land of Promise, and God had commanded them not to take certain clothing, cattle, silver & gold they found. In fact, He wanted these things destroyed so they would not be attracted to the Canaanite way of life. Achan did not take God's command seriously, and hid a whole bunch of stuff in the ground under his tent. He rationalized: "*No big deal*" / "*A little won't hurt*" / "*What I do won't affect anybody else*". A whole lot of trouble ensued! 36 men were killed, the Israelites were chased from the city gate, and their courage plummeted. Achan was found out and dealt with severely (i.e.: stoned).

God is promising here to change what had been a time of difficulty into a day of hope. God uses even our negative experiences to create opportunities to turn back to him. If we don't minimize our own sin(fullness), the "*place of disaster*" can become a "*place of hope*". But you've got to be willing to deal with "the stuff", "the garbage"!

#### III> I WILL TAKE AWAY [vv. 16-17]

Some things have to go! Some of the "Baals"—the false gods. We have to do some housecleaning (e.g.: old ideas, attitudes, ways). And when we do there's a subtle shift in our relationship with the Lord: from MASTER (owner) to HUSBAND (lover; friend). God wants to have a deep and personal relationship with us, based on LOVE not LAW (i.e.: trying to keep the commands, not angering Him, and avoiding punishment).

#### IV> I WILL BETROTH [vv. 19-20]

Betrothal in Hosea's day was more than a simple agreement to marry (i.e.: engagement). It was binding—a deep commitment really between two families for a future, permanent relationship. That's the difference between “living together” and “being married” in our day. Living together implies no obligation, duty, or responsibility. The back door is always open; anyone is free to leave at anytime. Marriage locks the back door and throws away the key! While many would interpret that to mean entrapment, it's really security. When life gets tough, it's good to know your partner isn't going to bale.

[A beautiful portrayal of this devotion through the worst of times—the Great Depression—is given in the recent movie, *Cinderella Man*.]

When we are betrothed to Christ, there is a 2-way commitment: US TO HIM and HIM TO US. No matter what—*for better or for worse*—He accepts us, loves us, forgives us, and continues to draw us into a relationship with Himself. We are the *Bride of Christ!*

That doesn't mean He winks at our sin; it does mean that He never stops loving us and providing a way for us to be made whole, to be made right with him.

#### V> I WILL RESPOND [vv. 21-22]

Look at how He cares for us. . .provides for our every need (physical, spiritual, emotional).

#### VI> I WILL SOW [v. 23]

He makes us fruitful, productive. Notice in this verse how “reverses the curses” of the three children.

*Jezreel* means “*God plants, sows, scatters*”. Here, the difference is that all of our life's efforts are not scattered to the wind, but planted in such a way as to produce a wonderful harvest. That's leading a purpose-driven life (i.e.: being what we were created to be, doing what we were created to do, fulfilling the purposes which we were created to fulfill).

That's God's restorative work! Let's review:

- Ø He will draw you to himself
- Ø He will deal with your garbage [or, get you to deal with it!]
- Ø He will help you make the changes you know you need to make (i.e.: do the housecleaning)
- Ø He will marry (commit) himself to you
- Ø He will provide for your every need
- Ø He will produce fruit—rich, lasting fruit—through your life

God can put love back into our hearts—for Him, for one another, for ourselves (from the guilt & shame). He can put love back into our marriages and our homes.

#### ILLUSTRATION

I knew of an alcoholic father one time who had abused his daughter pretty badly. [We'll call him *John*.] He was seeking treatment at Brighton Hospital where I worked at the time. He had not had any contact with her for years.

Part of the 12-Step Recovery Program involves making a list of people we have harmed and becoming willing to make amends to them providing that won't hurt them further. He said to his counselor: “*Since coming into TX here I have found a new relationship with God. And now I would like to find my daughter and see if there's any way she would forgive me and be a part of my life.*”

In a separate chain of events, one of the other counselors had had a young woman on her caseload a few weeks earlier who told of horrendous beatings and mistreatment in her childhood. She said she had lost contact with her father, and wondered what had become of him.

The stories were too close to be a coincidence, so we made a phone call to the young woman and it quickly became obvious that the man now in treatment was indeed her father. So John's counselor called him into his office and asked, "Would you like to talk to your daughter right now?" He trembled with fear, but said "More than anything in the world."

So the counselor dialed her number and handed the phone to John. It was a magical moment! Father & Daughter were reunited and restored.

You see, the first place to suffer when a father/husband rebels against God is the home. The first people to feel it are the children. But when God changes the heart of a father/husband, the first place to see the difference is the home, and the children are the first to benefit.

And it is never too late!!!

That's God's plan: the children reunited with the parents, the parents with the kids. It's how a loving God works.

### CONCLUSION

When the Lord said to Hosea: "*Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods. . .*" [Hosea 3:1] He did it, and in so doing gave us a wonderful model of God's love for us.

In that sense, Hosea's marriage to Gomer became not merely an "arrangement", but truly "*a marriage made in heaven*".