



Central
Peninsula
Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

Relentless Love

Hosea

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series: Taking God Seriously

When I was growing up, I had a nickname, and like many nicknames I didn't like it very much. I was called "Little Mitch." I was given that name not because I was so small but because my older brother was so big. He, of course, was "Big Mitch."

This morning we're starting a new series in a part of the Bible called the Minor Prophets. If these prophets were alive today they'd resent that name because they're certainly not of minor significance. They're called that because of their brevity, especially compared to the bigger, longer prophetic books like Isaiah and Jeremiah.

There are 12 of these Minor Prophets. We'll be taking a bird's eye view of one per week. In the Hebrew Old Testament they were actually bound together as one book, called The Book of the Twelve. They include Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

They're called prophets not because they predicted the future, though they did that, but because they spoke the word of God. They were God's mouthpiece. Their message wasn't some kind of crystal ball through which we see into the future, but rather it was God's word to God's people and it had to do with their here and now.

They did this over a long period of time. There were pre-exilic prophets who ministered in the ninth and eighth centuries before Christ. And there were post-exilic prophets who spoke in the fifth century before Christ. So their ministry spanned at least 400 years, longer than we've even been a nation! Notice also prior to the Assyrian exile God's people were a divided kingdom between Israel and Judah. Some prophets focused on Israel and others on Judah.

But what they all had in common was a passion to restore God's people to a right relationship with God. They believed God had chosen a people for Himself, He'd made a covenant with them, given them His law, given them a land, and given them a special city, Jerusalem. In that city there was a temple where God was to be worshipped. These people were the apple of His eye, called to display God's character to a dark world, but they were failing dramatically. Idolatry, injustice, immorality—all these things had sprouted like weeds and eventually taken over God's people. And so, these men stood up and spoke truth that wasn't popular. They called it what it was. The outstanding quality of these men was moral courage. They were the John Wayne's of the Bible. They rode into town and said what nobody wanted to

hear. We need more men and women like that today. We don't need ear ticklers; we have lots of those; we need truth tellers who will stand against the tide "come what may."

Few of us here are Jewish. We don't live in Jerusalem. We don't worship in the temple. But these prophets also had us in mind. They looked forward to a time when God's people, Jew and Gentile, would be regathered; a new King would be enthroned and a new covenant would be established. We live in those days. We have far greater privileges than even the Israelites, but we also have a greater calling. And I'm not convinced the church of Jesus Christ is **not** living up to its calling. A lot of people here in America call themselves Christians. Why then are we witnessing the collapse of our civilization? Our politicians are polarized. Few listen to them anymore, much less trust them. Our economy is still in a bad slump. Families are increasingly torn apart by infidelity, pornography, abuse, rebellion and divorce. Drug use, abortion, violence in the home and on the streets. Reality shows and gossip magazines parade all this drivel before us and many of us just sit in a bored stupor and amuse ourselves to death. We need these prophets to shake us up; to wake us up.

Introduction to Hosea

A recent magazine article said that Dolly Parton loves her men, in fact she says men are her weakness. As Dolly travels the world to perform, her husband of 45 years stays behind and works the farm. He likes to be at home, Dolly says, and he doesn't like to fly, so Dolly does most of her traveling solo. Trouble in their marriage? The two are still together after the many rumors through the years of Dolly's affairs with everyone from Burt Reynolds to Sylvester Stallone. She was even rumored to have an affair with Judy Ogle, her assistant and best friend. Dolly says she's just a big flirt, and her husband knows she's always coming back to him!

I don't know the truth about Dolly Parton's personal life, but you have to wonder how her husband really feels about all that. The traveling, flirting, rumors, not to mention the endless plastic surgeries, it all has to be hard on a guy. But what if I told you there was a guy in the Bible who had it a lot worse than that? What if I told you that one of our prophets was married not just to a flirtatious woman but a promiscuous woman; a woman known to be loose both in and out of marriage? What if I told you it was God Himself who told this prophet to marry her with full knowledge of who she was and what she would go on to do?

This is the story of the Old Testament prophet, Hosea. We don't know a whole lot about him. He's introduced in v. 1. *“The word of the LORD that came to Hosea son of Beeri during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and during the reign of Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel:.”* We know nothing of his father but his name. He spoke to the northern kingdom of Israel in the final days before their conquest and exile into Assyria. The king in Israel at that time was Jeroboam. Based on the names of the kings of Judah he also ministered during the reign of others who followed Jeroboam. These were kind of the “best of times and the worst of times.” It was a time of prosperity in Israel. The nation seemed to be secure from outside threat. These were also very religious people and signs of their devotion were all over. But it was the worst of times because the hearts of the people were empty; their faith was shallow, and corruption was rampant on every level. Not only that, after a period of decline, Assyria to the north was again on the rise, preparing to march on Israel.

In the midst of this, look what God told Hosea to do. *“When the LORD began to speak through Hosea, the LORD said to him, ‘Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the LORD.’ So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son”* (1:2–3). From time to time, God called His prophets to not just speak to His people, but to act the message out; to dramatize it. To show Israel the magnitude of her rebellion, the Lord told Hosea to marry a woman who was promiscuous, perhaps even a prostitute. Some find this to be so shocking they say she couldn't have been that when Hosea married her but would later become that way. However you look at this, it's clear Hosea knew what he was getting into.

But this isn't just a message about Israel's unfaithfulness. More than anything, this is a message about God's love. This is a message about God's relentless love for rebellious people. There are several things this story teaches us about God's love.

God's Love is Reckless

The first thing we see is that God's love is downright reckless. Why would a man marry a woman he knew would cheat on him? Who would do that? That's reckless. But here's something even more reckless: What kind of god makes a covenant with a people he knows will go chasing after other gods? It doesn't make sense. Why not choose a people he knew would be faithful? Why not choose people who'd appreciate his blessings?

We keep thinking God only loves good people, people who have their act together, at least people who try hard. But He loves the broken. He loves sinners. And just as He told Hosea to marry Gomer, He enters into covenant with us. Singer Steven Curtis Chapman said it well: “In the Gospel, we discover we're far worse off than we thought, and far more loved than we ever dreamed.”

It's like when my oldest daughter was a little girl and she had Cabbage Patch doll named Lenny Nate. They were inseparable. She had other toys far more valuable, but none she loved like Lenny Nate. Now Lenny Nate was ugly to begin with but soon he became filthy, smelly and tattered. There came a time when the sensible thing to do was to trash Lenny Nate. But that was unthinkable if you loved my daughter. If you loved her, you loved Lenny Nate — it was a package deal. It doesn't make sense, but God loves dirty, smelly, tattered sinners, and you can't separate him from them any more than you could separate her from that Cabbage Patch doll.

God's Love is Passionate

But not only is God's love reckless, it's passionate. We sometimes make the mistake of seeing God's love as sort of matter of fact, even something He's coldly reluctant to offer. But in this story, God says, here's what my love is like: It's like a man madly in love with a woman. He woos her and wins her. They get married and have a child together. Everything seems wonderful. But then she starts acting strange. She doesn't want to be near him. She goes out with her friends three to four nights a week. He begins to suspect something is going on. Then one night he follows her and watches as she enters another man's house. He's angry but really his heart is broken. God says, “Hosea, I want my people to understand how I feel about them by watching how you feel about Gomer.”

It wasn't easy to be a prophet! When you love someone passionately you can get hurt. That's the nature of love. It's risky. You can't force someone to love you back. God's hurt comes out in the naming of the children. Gomer's first child is a boy. He looks like Hosea. But God says in v. 4, *“Call him Jezreel.”* Hosea must have thought, “Did I hear that right?” Jezreel was a place. And not a very pleasant place in the history of God's people. This is a bit like calling your son Auschwitz. It was in Jezreel that a man named Jehu massacred the house of King Ahab and took the throne. The current king, Jeroboam, came from that stock. God says in v. 4, *“I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel.”*

Sounds to me like a wounded lover! But it gets worse. Verse 6 says, *“And Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter.”* This one didn't look like Hosea because she didn't come from Hosea. The Lord tells him, *“Call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means ‘not loved’), for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them.”* What a name for a little girl—not loved. But I thought God's love endures forever? It does, but when we insist on our own way and cling to our sin, God withdraws His daily mercies from us.

But Israel still didn't get it. Four years later when her daughter was weaned Gomer went out again and her adultery produced another son. God said, *“Call him Lo-Ammi (which means ‘not*

my people), for you are not my people and I am not your God.” Hurt, anger, a deep sense of rejection.

God's Love is Tough

Now in some of the things God said it almost sounded like He's divorcing His people; He's washing His hands of them. But there was a purpose, a strategy in all of this. You see, God's love is not only reckless and passionate, His love is also tough. Hosea didn't minimize the wrong Gomer had done to him. He didn't gloss over it. He didn't say, “Oh, it's no big deal. I know you didn't mean to do that.” He took it seriously. And when Gomer insisted on being unfaithful to him, he let her go. He must have known what could happen. She'd be used and abused. She'd be called names by those who were supposed to love her. She'd be beaten and treated like an animal. Hosea couldn't protect her from all that since she'd run away from him. So she would learn the lessons of life the hard way, and live out the consequences of her poor choices.

When we're unfaithful to God, when we run out on Him, when we refuse to listen, He has all kinds of ways of getting our attention, and most of them have to do with **pain**. This comes out over and over again in chapter 2. *“...I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst”* (v. 3).

“Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my olive oil and my drink.’ Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way” (verses 5–6).

“She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold— which they used for Baal. Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her naked body. So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days—all her appointed festivals. I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them. I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot,' declares the LORD” (verses 8–13).

Why is God doing this? Why is He allowing His beloved to suffer so much? Look at verses 14–15. *“Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”*

Do you see what He's doing? He allowing His people to taste the bitter fruit of sin so that we'll return to Him. He's luring us back. It's tough love.

There is a beautiful image at the end of v. 15. God says *“I will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.”* There was a place in Israel called the Valley of Achor where Joshua had to deal with a troublemaker named Achan. **Achor** means *trouble*. Sometimes you and I have to go down into the Valley of Trouble before we can find a door of hope. Some of you are there today and you need to know there is a door of hope open for you. But you can't travel through it without repentance. The New Testament speaks of “sorrow that leads to repentance.” It also speaks of God's discipline. Hebrews 12:5–6 says, *“My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.”* In other words, thank God for the Valley of Trouble because without it there is no door of hope!

I heard a story about a woman out for a hike who came upon a sheepfold. She saw the shepherd with his flock but then off to the side lay a single sheep that seemed to be suffering. She took a closer look and saw the sheep's leg was broken. She asked the shepherd what happened. He replied, “I broke it myself.” He went on to explain that of all the sheep this one was the most wayward. He wouldn't obey his voice and follow. More than once, he wandered to the edge of a perilous cliff. It was not only disobedient itself, but was also leading other sheep astray. So he said, “I had no choice. And I know from experience that when he heals he'll be the most obedient sheep in the entire flock. No sheep will respond to my voice as quickly as he. He will have learned obedience through suffering.”

It sounds cruel, but it's really more like a severe mercy. I think of 9–11 and I wonder what God's purpose was in that. He not only disciplines individuals; He disciplines nations. Have we listened? Did we take lightly the discipline of the Lord?

We do pay a price when we don't follow the Lord. But what kind of price does he pay?

God's Love is Costly

The fourth thing I want you to see from this story is God's love is costly. Look at chapter 3. *“The LORD said to me, ‘Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes”* (v. 1). Now remember, she's out there. She's been out there for awhile. You'd think Hosea was just starting to move on with his life. But God says to go find her. Go show your love for her again even though she's in another relationship. I want you to show everyone I love Israel like that.

I must tell you, I've known marriages like this. I've known marriages devastated by the unfaithfulness of a spouse. I've seen the

pain and the damage that kind of betrayal brings to a marriage. And sometimes a marriage can't recover from that. But I've also seen how there can be repentance and forgiveness and healing. It's not an easy thing or a quick thing. And it's costly.

So Hosea goes looking for her. We don't know how long it took him. But one day he found her on the auction block. Look at v. 2. *"So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley."* Gomer couldn't have been a pretty site. One thing had led to another and she ended up a slave for sale. In those days you could become a slave by birth if your parents were slaves. You could become a slave by conquest if your country was defeated in war. Or you could become a slave through debt. This is what must have happened to Gomer. And so it was that she found herself for sale.

By the way, slaves were always sold naked. Imagine the humiliation and shame as men bid barely enough to buy a goat. The normal price for a slave was 30 shekels of silver. But when Hosea showed up he got her for a bargain: 15 shekels of silver and a bushel of barley. It's like she was being sold in the Dollar Store! Then what did he do? Now he owned her. He could do whatever he wanted. She could become his slave. He could have even killed her. But he clothed her and brought her home. He told her in verses 3–4, *"Then I told her, 'You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you.' For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods."* Things couldn't be the same between them for awhile. She still had to wean herself off her lovers as Israel would have to do in her exile.

But what kind of love is this? It's costly love. It's a love where God seeks us and finds us. He then steps into the marketplace of sin and buys us out of sin's slavery through the death of His own Son. We're Gomer. We're being sold on the auction block of sin. The world bids for us. Satan bids for us. But Jesus comes along and offers himself. He says, "I bid the price of my blood to have that sinner as my own." The auctioneer says, "That's the highest bid. Sold to the Lord Jesus Christ." Then what does He do? He clothes us with His own righteousness and brings us home, teaching us to walk with Him.

God's Love is Everlasting

And because of that, there is one more thing we can say about His love. It's everlasting. In v. 5 God says something very important.

"Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days." So He's looking forward to the time after the exile and in what He calls the last days to a time when His people would freely return to seek the Lord their God and David their king. At the end of chapter 1 He spoke about that time as well. Look at 1:10–2:1. *"Yet the Israelites will be like the sand on the seashore, which cannot be measured or counted. In the place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' they will be called 'children of the living God.' The people of Judah and the people of Israel will come together; they will appoint one leader and will come up out of the land, for great will be the day of Jezreel. Say of your brothers, 'My people,' and of your sisters, 'My loved one.'"*

This is looking forward to this present time. The new, regathered Israel is us, the church. This leader, this King whom Hosea spoke of is the son of David, Jesus Christ. We were not God's people but now we are. We were not loved but now we are. Look what Paul writes about how God has chosen us in the book of Romans 9:23–25, *"What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? As he says in Hosea: 'I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one.'"*

You see, in the end God will not give up or walk out on His people. His love **does** endure forever. In the very last chapter of this book God says, *"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them"* (14:4).

Conclusion

God's love for rebellious people is relentless. It's a love that's reckless...passionate...tough...costly...and everlasting. You can't outrun this love. You might be so far away right now from God, but He's seeking you. He's blocked your path with thorn bushes. He's walled you in. He's taken away your grain and your new wine. He broken your leg. But make no mistake: He wants to turn your Valley of Trouble into a door of hope. Will you let Him do that?

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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