

“Unrequited Love”

An unfaithful wife leaves a husband devastated. But how *he* responds to her betrayal is a wonderful story of love told in God’s word, and it pictures for us the great love of God. Unrequited love is a common theme in many a life. Sometimes a person spends their entire life loving somebody else, and that love is never returned. *Love That Went Unanswered* is the true story of a man named Tom Mooney who lived in the 1900’s. He was involved in a bombing in 1916. The evidence led authorities to him; he was arrested and sent to prison. But his wife never stopped loving him. She began what proved to be a thirty year effort to get her husband out of prison. During those years, it was very hard. She had to work to support herself. She took on hard, menial labor and worked herself down during those thirty years. She watched her youth slip away and she aged prematurely because of her undying devotion to her husband, now imprisoned.

All the while, she was seeing anybody of any importance, anybody with any kind of influence, trying anything and everything to get her husband released from prison. Finally, after thirty long years, she had won enough support that he was allowed to go free. Would you believe, though, that within a year, he had left her behind, and had found and married another woman?

I John 4:19 “We love him, because he first loved us.”

The love of God compels us to love Him in return, but in the lives of many, His love goes unrequited. I’m going to tell you a tragic, yet beautiful story of love from the Old Testament scriptures today.

Unrequited love is not always of a romantic nature, between a man and a woman. It can also be love by parents lavished upon their children. I’m reminded of a heartbreaking story about a single mother, a widowed woman who devoted her life to raising her little boy. She was determined that she would save enough money to send him to college, and it was difficult, but she did it. She took in people’s washing and ironing, she worked all kinds of little jobs in order to squirrel away enough money to be able to give her son an education. She sacrificed her youth just to see to it that he had a chance in life.

The boy grew up, went to a university and the day finally came for him to graduate. So, his mother went to the city to see him receive his diploma. She sat there so proud, admiring him. But as he walked across the stage and looked out across the audience, he saw his mother. She didn’t fit in. He found himself ashamed and unwilling to be associated with her because the shabby country dress that she wore didn’t fit in with the beautiful and costly clothing worn by the parents of his friends. The story says that after the graduation was over, he didn’t even go seek her out and proudly introduce her to his friends and thank her. Instead, he slipped off quietly to celebrate with his classmates.

That type of story angers us. That boy is a shame and a disgrace. That kind of unrequited love makes us rise up in righteous indignation. But such examples suggest a theme that one finds repeatedly in the word of God. Might I add that in many cases, it is a very personal theme. One of the most impressive and touching stories of the whole Bible is found in the book of **Hosea**.

Hosea was one of the minor prophets, in the sense that the book that he wrote was not as long as the books written by Isaiah, Jeremiah and some of the others. Thus, we call them the 'major' prophets. But Hosea certainly was not minor in what he said. He had a powerful message. He lived about 700 years before Jesus was born, and during that time, there unfolded a story in his own life that grips our hearts today. It's the story of a woman named Gomer who became Hosea's wife. Gomer ended up having a lot of problems—a lot of worse problems than having a name like Gomer. Hosea was madly in love with her, and he was devastated when she ultimately left him for other lovers. She became unfaithful to Hosea and their children, and her life spiraled out of control. It wasn't long until the Bible pictures her standing with her head bowed in shame. This is where sin took her. She is being sold in the market as a slave.

The most remarkable part of that story is who showed up that day and bought her. Would you believe that it was Hosea? Her own husband, whom she had betrayed and sinned against! God told Hosea to go and do that, because God was painting a very powerful picture of His relationship to His people. In **Hosea 3**, Hosea goes to the market and buys Gomer back for himself for fifteen pieces of silver and some barley. Look at what he told her.

Hosea 3:3 "And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide with me for many days; thou shalt not play the harlot, and thou shalt not be for another man: so will I also be for thee."

The vows of marriage were renewed, and he thus began a new life with her. It must have taken a lot of humility for Hosea to be able to follow God's instructions and take back that guilty woman. God begins to draw the parallel for us in the next verse.

Hosea 3:4-5 "For the children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim: Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days."

The reason Hosea's story stands out so much is that as the prophecy tells us, he's really not telling his OWN story as much as he's telling GOD'S story. Some people think that this was merely a dream or an allegory just told as an illustration, but others believe that it was a real incident in the life of Hosea. It seems to me that the narrative indicates it was a true story, and I think that's what makes it so compelling. But regardless, it was used as a parallel by God to say, "That's the way My people have been."

There are fourteen chapters in the book of Hosea, and the first three are used to tell Hosea's personal story. Beginning in chapter four, there unfolds the parallel that God draws for His people: Israel, like Gomer, had not been faithful to her espoused husband, God, and the prophet lists the grievances that God had against them, and there were plenty of them. God had every right to put Israel away, totally forsake her and have nothing to do with her. But the beauty of this prophetic message is that just as it was in the life of Hosea himself—who loved Gomer though she was guilty and vile and unworthy of his love—the last chapters of the book show how that God, in patient and tender love, like Hosea, was willing to take His people back even though they had been unfaithful to Him.

Hosea 14:1 “O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.”

Hosea 14:4-7 “I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. They that dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the corn, and grow as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon.”

This ancient story should touch our hearts today because frankly, there is a great deal of unrequited love in OUR age. I'm not speaking of the love that a husband fails to return to a faithful wife, or vice versa. I'm not talking about the disappointment and heartbreak when children fail to love their parents. Rather, I'm talking about the love that you and I often fail to return to our God. The history of God's dealings with man has really been a one-way street. The love of God has been poured out without measure, but it hasn't been returned, to any great degree. This IS a love story. There are people who like to picture God as some horrible, mean, cruel, vengeful monster, but actually the Bible paints a different picture of God. He is holy and righteous; therefore He cannot countenance and have fellowship with sin. God is indeed a God of wrath, who punishes sin. God had every right to totally wipe out the human race, but instead He showed His love. You've not *really* read the Bible if you don't understand that.

In the Garden of Eden, we get the first glimpse of God's affection for His creation. He created a literal paradise for man to live within. He gave man a lovely place to dwell and enabled him to provide his livelihood without effort. He merely gave man one rule to live by: not to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He wanted man to remain innocent and pure. Man could not have been any more loved than he was in the beginning.

But man failed to love God as he ought to have loved Him, and he disobeyed God. The beginning of man's degradation and decline into sin is described there in Genesis. Down through the Old Testament, the theme is repeated over and over and over again. It's the story of wayward Israel and the wanderings that followed. Israel rebelled in the land of Canaan, and finally became so evil and ungrateful that they were carried off into Babylonian captivity. It's also the story of the Jews' rejection of their own Messiah. The life of Jesus is a story of unrequited love.

Isaiah 53:3 “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”

He brought life and light to a dark, sin-cursed world, but that same world spit in His face and turned Him away. Christ loved man enough to walk the lonely last mile to Calvary and to lay down His life for him, but in reality, man hardly said thanks for the salvation that Christ brought. As they crucified Him and left Him to hang before the world as a spectacle of shame, Jesus so tenderly cried out, “***Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.***” (Luke 23:34). But they didn't take Him down from the cross. Instead, those calloused men sat and gambled for His clothes, they spit upon Him and mocked Him like a fool. The story of unrequited love, you see, runs deep in the history of the world.

Isaiah 53:6 “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

But thank God His grace was greater than our sin!

Romans 5:8 “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

But the story of unrequited love continues in our own generation. It comes down to people like us who do not necessarily live the kind of lives that God asks us to live; or we only live it in part, or when it's convenient. When it comes to something we ought to do, we go our own willful way. You see, we too have returned only meager love and devotion to God. That brings up the question: how DO we love God? What does it mean to love God? Do you love God? Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?

I have a feeling that today, if we could have a conversation, you would tell me, “Oh, yes, I love the Lord Jesus! You just don't know how much I love the Lord Jesus!” I hope that's true. I hope you love God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength. But how do we REALLY love God? So many people talk about loving God, and they claim to do great things to show their love. But are they really returning the kind of selfless love that God asks us for?

First of all, we *show* God that we love Him by keeping His commandments. That's really the bottom line. If you don't seek to keep the commandments of the Lord Jesus, you don't love the Lord. You're deceiving yourself if you say, “I love the Lord, I love God,” but then you ignore what His word says.

John 14:21 “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him...”

I John 2:4-5 “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected...”

I John 5:2-3 “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.”

So, can't we see how hypocritical it is to *claim* to love the Lord, then *ignore* His word and do what pleases us instead of Him? We compromise His word, we don't take it seriously. Man can't claim that he loves the Lord and then, for example, refuse to follow the Lord in baptism, because Jesus made that a command of the gospel.

Mark 16:16 “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned.”

For the life of me, I don't understand the objection that people have to baptism into the Lord Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, as the Bible says. Yet, they resist it, they dismiss it and minimize it. Friends, it is a command of the Lord Jesus Christ! Someone says, “Well, a person may not be baptized as

you say the Bible says he ought to be baptized, but, oh, he loves Jesus, and that's what really counts." If he refuses to do what Jesus says, he doesn't love Jesus. He's deceiving himself.

A man cannot claim that he loves God and then refuse to be with God's people and assemble with the church.

Hebrews 10:25 "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is..."

How can you love the Lord Jesus Christ and despise His bride, speak ill of His bride and refuse to have anything to do with His bride? A man can't say he loves Jesus, and then refuse to give his time, money and energy to the kingdom of God.

Luke 9:23 "...If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."

A man can't claim to love God and continue to live an immoral, sinful life.

Colossians 3:5 "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:"

"Mortify" means *to put to death*. You see, if I really love the Lord, I'll humbly resign myself to do His will, regardless of what His word tells me to do. Are you showing the Lord that you love Him by the life that you lead? Will you show Him how much you love Him by meeting Him in worship today? By rendering to Him the praise that He is due?

Secondly, we show the Lord how much we love Him by telling others about Him. There is a famous conversation between the Lord and His disciple, Peter, recorded in **John 21**. After the Lord's resurrection, Jesus asked Peter a soul-piercing question.

John 21:15 "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

There is some dispute over to what the Lord was referring to with the word "*these*." Let me tell you what I believe that the Jesus means: Peter was a fisherman by trade, and as such, he loves the sea. Peter doubtlessly loved his boats, his nets. That was the life that he knew before he began following Jesus. In fact, Peter was in his boat fishing when the Lord appeared to him this third time. I think He was asking Peter, "Where do I rank among the other things in your life?" In other words, did he love Jesus enough to lay down his nets and take up the cross that he would have to bear as an apostle in the church and as a preacher of the gospel? He asked Peter that question three times! Well, it got under Peter's skin and he answered him very passionately the third time.

John 21:17 "...Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs."

What did the Lord mean by that? Peter had a job to do in the kingdom of God, and he showed how much he loved the Lord when he, possessed of such courage, stood up and condemned those hard-hearted men and women who had so cruelly crucified the Lord Jesus, and his fiery, passionate sermon melted their hearts like fire on ice, and they came to obey Him as their Lord and King. That's a different Peter, isn't it, than a few days before when he so cowardly denied that he even knew Jesus.

You see, the Lord was testing Peter. He would never be ashamed of the Lord again. He may have denied Him on that fateful night in that courtyard in Jerusalem, but from that day forward, he would tell everybody he met about Jesus. Let me tell you, if a man loves the Lord, he won't be ashamed for others to know how much he loves Him. He will stand up for the truth and not be timid and embarrassed for his friends and the whole world for that matter, to know about his faith in God and His word, if he loves the Lord Jesus.

Thirdly, if we truly love Jesus, we'll put Him first in our lives. FIRST. As I stated, I think that's what Jesus was getting at with Peter the fisherman. Would his love requite Peter's faithfulness and devotion? Would he put the cause of Christ above his boats and his nets?

Matthew 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

The divine imperative is that HE must come before anything else down here: your job, your education, your pleasure (yes, your golfing, fishing and hunting, your college football or basketball, your NFL, your trips to the woods, mountains or beach)—it's FIRST, or it's nothing. The Lord demands first place in our lives every day that we live, and He deserves first place in our hearts and in our affairs. His love requires of us no less of a sacrifice.

Are you requiting the love that God showed to you while you were yet a sinner? Are you reaching out and returning that love, by loving the Lord with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength?