



LOVING THE UNLOVABLE

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Greetings and welcome to Let the Bible Speak. I hope you'll spend the next few minutes with me and open the word of God. I think if you'll behold, with me, the picture God is painting in our scripture text, through one of His prophets, we'll have an even deeper appreciation for our relationship to the God who made us. I'm reading now from the Old Testament book of Hosea, and I'll read two passages to set the stage for the story that is told in this little but important book.

Hosea 1:2-3 says, ***"When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the LORD." So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son."*** And then, in Hosea 3:1-5, it reads: ***"Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans." So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. And I said to her, "You shall stay with me many days; you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so, too, will I be toward you." For the children of Israel shall abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They shall fear the LORD and His goodness in the latter days."***

Of all the places you would expect to find a preacher – a slave market, purchasing an immoral woman to be his wife – is probably not one of them. Yet, that's where we find the prophet Hosea, thousands of years ago. And God sent him there! It's such a shocking scenario until many bible scholars and commentators haven't quite known what to say about it. Some have said "surely this didn't really happen" and so, they say that Hosea either just had a vision about these things or God inspired him to make up this story as a parable or illustration. However, there is absolutely nothing in the text to indicate such. We just have to face the facts as Hosea recorded them and come to see that God was teaching His people a powerful lesson through the life of this great man and his unusual circumstance. It

certainly makes for a riveting drama but it's not so much the story of Hosea and his family as it is the story of God and His family.

First, there was the original command for Hosea to marry this woman, God said to him in Hosea 1:2-3 "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry" ... and in verse 3: "So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son." Now, you can read these first few verses and immediately know that Hosea had bigger problems than just being married to a woman named 'Gomer'. God commanded him to go marry an immoral woman and to have a family with her. Now, I believe that when calls her a "wife of harlotry", that God is looking at her character and into the future. In other words, it wasn't that she was a harlot when Hosea married her, but rather that God told him to marry a woman that He knew would not be faithful to him. Notice, God calls her a "wife of harlotry". I think that means that's the kind of wife and mother she would turn out to be, a woman who in time would forsake her vows and turn to an adulterous and immoral life. Unfortunately, we see many marriages like that today. We see many who enter the holy estate of matrimony but don't keep their vows. They sin against God and against the marriage and eventually abandon the marriage altogether. There are many people living in relationships forbidden by God today because of adultery. They're not married to the person that promised to love and cherish and be faithful to until death do part but instead, they found someone else and left one marriage to go to another. The bible calls that adultery and it's wrong.

But here, God prompted Hosea to enter a marriage with a woman who would turn out that way. Why? Well, God wasn't playing some cruel joke on Hosea, and He wasn't conducting some kind of social experiment. Rather, He was using the sinfulness of this woman and the heartbroken faithfulness of Hosea to awaken His people to the things they were doing in their relationship to God. Look again at verse 2; "...Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the LORD." You see, Hosea was, like many of the other prophets, charged by God with upbraiding the people for turning away from God and practicing idolatry. Nothing, I repeat, nothing is more offensive to God than worshipping something or someone else besides Him. And yet, that has been the greatest temptation and the most oft-recurring sin among God's people since near the beginning of time.

Now, don't get the idea that idolatry is just some innocent, ignorant, and superstitious practice involving statues and graven images. That's bad enough but there's more to it than just that. Idolatry is the worship of anything or anyone else besides God. Idolatry means a person is giving their heart and their homage to something or someone besides the only One who is worthy of it and that is God. Yes, an idol may be a statue. It may be a carved image. It may be nature or man's personification of nature. And there's plenty of all of that in our world even today. But idolatry is more prevalent than just those things. An idol can be money, or material things, or fame, an athlete, a movie star, a musician, a politician (like the Caesar's of ancient Rome), the state or a government itself; human learning and philosophy; and on and on. But ultimately, the idol becomes us. You see, idolatry (according to Romans chapter 1) is born out of the desire to be free from God's sovereign rule over us and so we make a god in His place that is or represents what we want it to represent – which ultimately means that god is the person himself.

So, God abhors idolatry and time and again throughout their history as a people, the nation of Israel turned to the gods of the Canaanites, and the Moabites, and all of the other "ines and ites" instead of worshipping and obeying God alone. That greatly angered God and it angers God when people do it today. God's wrath burned hot against the people when they got involved in idolatry and His punishments were severe. But God had a plan for Hosea's family, just like He had plans for His people,

the Israelites. And interestingly, God knew the temptation and the propensity of His people would be to betray Him and practice idolatry. Well, God knew what Hosea's wife was capable of and He knew that this marriage would get off to a rocky beginning. And it did.

By the time we get to chapter 2, the prediction had come to pass, and we find Gomer betraying Hosea and falling into another man's arms. She abandoned her husband and her home and found herself living a life of adultery and harlotry. She was a picture of the nation of Israel whom God had chosen many years before but who had since been unfaithful to Him again and again. Three children were born to the short-lived union of Hosea and Gomer. Each of them was given names that represented judgment, shame, sorrow, and punishment. The first son was named Jezreel which means "to scatter". The second – a daughter – was named Lo-ruhamah which means "she has not obtained mercy". The third was a son named Lo-ammi which means "not my people". Names had great meaning in bible days and in this case, each one is a picture of what would happen to the sons and daughters of Israel due to the unfaithfulness of God's bride – the Israelite nation. Here is a family ruined by sin – and sin will ruin your family. In fact, anytime a home is broken, parents split up, adultery is committed, marriage vows are forsaken there is ALWAYS sin involved and every person in that home pays a heavy price in one way or another.

Hosea chapter 2 paints a sad picture of where sin had put Israel in the eyes of God. Yet, the most amazing part and the point that God wanted to drive home to His people was that He had not stopped loving them and He still wanted a relationship with them. He could not tolerate their sin and their idolatry, but His love would draw them back to His arms and He wanted to forgive, and He desired a new relationship where things were like they were meant to be in the beginning. But Gomer was a long ways away. Her life is a wreck. She has left a loving, caring, and providing husband and has prostituted herself to others and when we come to chapter 3, she is standing in a slave market being sold to the next person who would use and defile her. That, too, is a picture of where sin leaves the sinner. That's an ugly portrait of God's creation ruined and disgraced by evil and sold out to sin. When you give you yourself over to the flesh and the passions of sin, you become chained hand and foot to the devil himself.

Ironically, many people choose sinful lives thinking that they are free to live like they want to. They're tired of the confinement of godly and holy living. They're tired of being faithful to God and they throw off the harness and think they have the power to do as they please. How terribly naïve and pathetically deceived the devil causes us to be. Peter said of those drawn away from the truth and the false teachers who deceived them: "...they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage." (2 Peter 2:18-19) Paul said in Romans 6:16 "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" And Solomon said in Proverbs 5:22 "His own iniquities entrap the wicked man, and he is caught in the cords of his sin."

Here, now, is Gomer: used up, disgraced, broken, hopeless, defiled, and dirty, standing in a slave market. And God sends Hosea there to find her and once again marry her! Hosea 3:1, "Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans." Surely, people wondered why Hosea, that great and holy man of God was going to a slave market. But if that surprised them, how much more when they saw who he went there seeking! He had suffered a great tragedy in his home. His wife had deserted him. She had become a harlot. She had left the sweetness of

a godly home and gone out to sow her wild oats and have a good time. But now! How her charms have faded and here she is being sold at public auction as a slave. Hosea should have been the last person on earth that day going to that filthy place. But he did go. How could he do it? Peter said, "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8) and Hosea's love had quite a multitude of sins to cover. It's hard to imagine him loving a woman like that, even if she had once been his wife. But he did. And this prophet of God becomes a portrait of God.

Hosea reached deep into his pocket, and it seems from the text that he gave every last thing he could scrape up to redeem this wretched woman and bring her home. A few coins and what he couldn't pay in coins, he would give in grain from his field. It was a **COSTLY LOVE**, in other words, but He loved her enough to pay it so he could bring her home and give her a new life she didn't deserve. What a love! It was a love that endured the embarrassment. It was a love that looked beyond himself and his heart that had been broken a thousand times over. He swallowed his pride and humbled himself for a woman who had **HUMILIATED** herself. It was a deep and true love for the woman herself and his great desire for her to be a faithful wife and mother and for them to have a holy and happy relationship.

Well, you see, I hope the real picture God is painting here. That's how God felt about His people. She had sinned. She had been punished. She was exiled. But God, through her punishment and through her sorrow, was working to fulfill His purpose in her. So, Hosea brings her home and tenderly tells her how things must be. There had to be repentance and there had to be a change. But despite what she had done, he would marry her again and establish a family that would stand together forever. And in this restored relationship, God was expressing His plans to take Israel, despite her sin, and cleanse her and remake her, and bless the world through her. In other words, one day her Messiah and His kingdom would come and all of God's plans and purposes through her would be fulfilled to the human family. That came to pass many years later in Jesus Christ and His present kingdom.

There's so much more in the narrative that we could tell and scriptures we could examine – but that's the snapshot of this strange but beautiful story. In God showing Hosea how to love an unlovable woman – He was showing us how He Himself loves the unlovable. The Book of Hosea may be a picture of Israel's history, but it's by extension, a picture of yours and mine. God created us in His image and for His glory. He made man wanting a loving relationship with us, but He also made us creatures with a choice and He knew therefore that sin would eventually enter the picture and ruin the relationship. And you may be yet in your sins today. You are far from God and sold out to sin and to this wicked and cruel world. You stand in the devil's slave market and can only hang your head before God in shame. But God showed up. And in His tender mercy, He made the most supreme sacrifice He could ever make – He gave His precious and beloved Son as a ransom for you and He wants to redeem you. That's the definition of love. And it's a hard heart that would reject such love and spurn such salvation.

Many years ago, it's said a man in a mental institution died. When they cleaned out his room, they found scrawled on the wall these immortal words that we have sang for generations. "Could we with ink the oceans fill and were the sky of parchment made; Were every stalk on earth a quill and every man a scribe by trade; To write the love of God above would drain the ocean dry, Nor could the scroll contain the whole though stretched from sky to sky." We then sing a chorus "O love of God, how rich and pure, how measureless and strong; It shall forevermore endure; The saints and angels' song."

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