

# Hosea 1

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[ 0 : 00 ] Hosea. And it's on page 751. If you've got a church Bible. We're going to be talking about the love of God! That seems like an odd thing.

But that's what I want us to see in this prophecy of Hosea. Let's get straight to the text. Look at verse 2. It's a really shocking start to the book.

Chapter 1 verse 2. Go marry a prostitute, Hosea. Eugene Peterson in the message says, find a whore and marry her and make this whore the mother of your children.

It's hard to imagine, is it, a less promising start to a relationship, a marriage. Hosea, I've got good news for you and I've got bad news for you.

The good news is I found your wife. The bad news is she's going to break your heart. Isn't that cruel? Why mess with Hosea's life in that way?

[ 1 : 27 ] Why break Hosea's heart? What is God doing? If God wants a visual aid, why doesn't he use cardboard? Or why doesn't he color it in?

Why command a faithful prophet to take an unfaithful wife? Why would God do something like that? And the answer is this, that you and I might get a glimpse of the heart of God for a lost humanity.

That we might just get a glimpse of how God feels about people like us. And God is desperate that you should know how much he loves you.

God is desperate that we might know how much our self-centeredness and our sin hurts him. And so he puts Hosea through this terrible experience that we might get the message across.

Is God like a stern teacher? Critical teacher wagging his finger at us because we've broken the rule. Is that how you see him?

[ 2 : 34 ] Some people see God like that in church, don't they? Some people have been brought up in legalistic churches. That's how they see God, as a stern headmaster wagging his finger whenever you break the rules. Is that how the Bible portrays him?

How do we see him? Does God put us through the ordeals of life? Like some indifferent, dispassionate, objective scientist?

Putting us through the ordeals of life, like laboratory rats. Is he some distant God conducting an experiment? Or is he like the politicians?

Politicians are often well-meaning, aren't they? And yet incompetent. Unable to rule the world in a way that we think we could do it. Well-meaning, but doesn't have control.

Is that how you see God? In relation to yourself or the world? Or do you see him as a lover? A lover whose heart is broken by our promiscuity.

[ 3 : 39 ] That is the picture of Hosea chapter 1. And this whole prophecy of Hosea is about the restoration of a broken relationship. And you see, that is what has gone wrong in the world.

The relationship between God and ourselves is broken. And so, what you have here in this book of Hosea is you have a warning.

But you also have a God who is wooing us. He's warning and wooing. Through the painful experience of Hosea. And he is calling us back to him.

Calling us to return to him. It's an extraordinary story of unrequited love. And through it, God appears to us as a jilted lover. As a jealous husband.

And as a just God and saviour. That's my three points. We see firstly, God is a jilted lover. So Hosea is told in verse 2 to marry a woman. Who's going to desert him and disgrace him and break his heart.

[ 4 : 39 ] And so God wants you tonight to enter into his feelings. It's just like when Abraham, do you remember Abraham, was told to sacrifice Isaac.

How did God say that? Do you remember how God said that to Abraham? He didn't just say sacrifice Isaac, did he? He said, Abraham, take your son.

Your only son. Isaac, whom you love. He wants us to understand how he feels about giving up his own son to death on the cross.

And so here with Hosea, he wants us to enter into his feelings. How he feels about people. Imagine you've got a friend, you've not seen him actually for a number of years.

5, 10, 15 years. And you hear that your friend has got married. You're interested. And you're looking forward to meeting his new wife.

[ 5 : 46 ] You're aged to meet up in town, at a coffee shop in the city. But you're a little bit surprised when you turn up. His wife, her skirt is too short.

There's a bit too much makeup on her face. And it turns out she's a sex worker. And you say, Hosea, how did that happen?

And he says, well, God told me to marry her. It's a marriage made in heaven. It's shocking, isn't it? Now I need to say this. Don't try this at home. Not everything in the Bible is to be copied by us. Not all narrative is normative. This is what the commentator's called prophetic symbolism.

Sometimes the Old Testament prophets, they were called by God to act out the message. Because the people had stopped listening. And so it is almost as if God is saying to Israel and to his people, through the prophet Hosea, read my lips.

[ 6 : 51 ] They'd just assumed, they'd just presumed on God's goodness. God is a God of love. And God will forgive us, that's his job. And he will never be angry with anyone.

And God is saying through this experience of Hosea, read my lips. And if you really want to know how I feel about you, and how I feel about the way that you behave towards one another, and the way that you behave towards me, read my lips, I'm going to show you.

And he is confronting them with their unfaithfulness. And every time people saw Hosea walking around with Gomer on his arm, they got the message. Don't you think it would have been the talk of the town?

C.S. Lewis reminds us wonderfully that to love is to be vulnerable. He writes this, Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give it to no one, not even an animal.

Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries. Avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change.

[ 8 : 05 ] It will not be broken. It will become unbreakable. Impenetrable. Irredeemable. To love, says Lewis, is to be vulnerable.

And we need to be really careful here, but God in Christ, in the person of Jesus Christ, has made himself vulnerable. And so God does not shout down instructions from heaven.

He hasn't sent down a magic book that's written in hieroglyphics and you have to put on a pair of special glasses to read. He's made himself, in the person of his son, vulnerable. By coming into this world.

Without ceasing to be what he eternally was, he became what he eternally was not, Augustine said. He became one of us, tempted at every point as we are untried.

And that is the gospel. To love is to become vulnerable. And the gospel shows us that our God, the God of the Bible, the God in whom we want to invite you to put your trust in tonight, he is not remote, and he is not distant, and he is not dispassionate.

[ 9 : 21 ] He is a God who cares deeply about us. And the way that we behave. Now let me pause to apply this before we move in.

It means that sin, my sin and your sin, is not just that we break the rules. As if God had put the Ten Commandments up on the wall, and that's what you've got to obey.

Sin is not simply breaking the rules, it is actually breaking God's heart. I love the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

You know that, but the question, what is sin? Sin is any want of conformity unto or... Say that again?

Yeah, any want of conformity unto or... Now, it's... Where is it? I haven't got... Anybody remember it?

[10:30] This is terrible, isn't it? Sin is any want of conformity unto or against the law of God. I think that's right. Look at this, it's terrible, isn't it? It's a good definition, but it's not enough, is it?

Because sin is not just breaking the rules, it is breaking God's heart. Sin is relational. Packer writes this, J.R. Packer says, it upsets a man more to learn that his wife is sleeping around than the girl next door is doing it.

So God is outraged. God is brokenhearted to find his own covenant people, the people that he has rescued from Egypt with his own arm. The people that he's brought through a howling wilderness. The people that he's brought into the promised land. The people that he's showered blessings upon them. And God is outraged to find his own covenant people unfaithful to him. Chasing after gods as they were in the reign of King Jeroboam, the son of Joash, the king of Israel.

And they worship Canaanite gods along with the God of the Bible. How do you think God feels when they turn their back on him? Have you ever had that happen to you at a function or a party?

[11:42] Or even at a church can happen, can't it? There's a group of people and they're talking amongst themselves in a circle.

And you come along and you hover. And you try to join in the circle. But they kind of close it off. And instead of opening it up to you and including you, they draw in and they deliberately exclude you. They shut you out. That is very painful, isn't it? It's not only painful, it's embarrassing. You feel like an idiot standing there. And I don't know if you've had that happen to you.

And yet, that is what you and I have done with God. That is the nature of sin. That is what sin is. We've turned in on ourselves, away from the God who made us, away from the God who loves us, away from the God who wants the best for us.

And we've turned in on ourselves and turned our back to him. And so, let me say this. Whether you've ever been treated like that, whether you've been treated like that on social media or in the real world or in school or in church, if it's happened to you, and even if you're in a relationship like that now, in a marriage like that, let me tell you, God knows.

[13:03] And God feels for you. He feels for you. Faber, in one of his hymns, he says, there is no place where earth's sorrows are felt more than up in heaven. You see, God is not dispassionate.

God is not remote. God is not aloof from us. He has made himself, in the person of his son, vulnerable. And love makes itself vulnerable.

And that is what God has done for us in Christ. But it gets even more shocking. Because God, the jilted lover, the one who we've turned our backs upon and excluded from our lives is also the jealous spouse. Look at verses 4 to 9.

You see, there's children in this marriage. And Isaiah is not only to marry this woman, Gomer, but he's to have children by her. And they've got three kids, two boys and a girl. But there's a question mark, I think, over the paternity of these children.

The firstborn is his, verse 3. So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. But it doesn't say that about the other two. It just says in verse 6, doesn't it, she conceived again.

[14:08] And in verse 8, she had another son. And I guess we'll never know whether Hosea was the father of all of them. I actually doubt if he knew. How painful is that?

A broken marriage, a dysfunctional family. But look at the names of the kids. Call him Jezreel. I heard of a little girl whose parents called her Hiroshima.

That's on the same scale. Jezreel was the scene of a bloody massacre. Call him Auschwitz. Call him Dunblain.

Call him Columbine. Shocking, isn't it? The name Jezreel literally means God scatters. Do you see what is happening? God is revealing his judgment and because of their unfaithfulness, he says, I'm going to scatter you.

And Israel is now God's runaway bride. Call him Jezreel, but it gets worse. Gomer's a daughter in verse 6. And whether Hosea is the father or not is a moot point, we just don't know.

[15:14] So they call her Lo-Rahamah. What's her name mean? Her name means not loved. Imagine having a name like that in the school playground.

What's your name? My name's not loved. How heartbreaking. And this is God's word to his people because of their sin, because of their unfaithfulness. God is saying to them, Jezreel, I'm going to scatter you.

Lo-Rahamah, I will no longer love you or show you any pity. That's what it means, but it gets even worse, verse 8. They have a third child and that third child, verse 8, he's called.

Not my people. For you are not my people and I am not your God. The theme tune of the Bible. I am your people and you are my people and I am your God.

And Hosea reverses it. It's the youngest in his family. They meet, I'm not my people and people say, she looks just like her mother.

[16:24] Yes, Hosea says, he's not mine and I'm not going to call him mine. Do you see what's happening?

All through the Bible, all through the Bible from Genesis onwards, from that time, the story of the Bible is the story of a marriage. It's a marriage relationship with Abraham and it's promised to Abraham and I will be your God and you will be my people and he keeps repeating the promise over and over and over again.

And now he's saying, you're not my people and I'm not your God. Can you see how serious it is? It's as if God rips up publicly the marriage certificate. I can't put it any better than the commentator Derek Kidner who says this, God compares his actions not to that of an autocrat who no one dares question nor a father who rejoices in an adoring wife and children but to that of a husband whose wife has left him and whose children are like strangers in his own house and they are fast destroying themselves.

Do you see what God is saying? He's saying, read my lips. You're just presuming on my goodness and you think you'll get away with it. And wherever he went with the three kids, whenever he's in the supermarket and some granny stops them and says, oh, what's your name, dear?

The message would have come across, wouldn't it, loud and clear, scattered, not loved, not mine, disowned. And so God is a jilted lover.

[18:05] He's a jealous husband but do you notice how the chapter ends on a note of hope? There's a just God and Savior. The judgment comes down on Israel, on these people because they've turned their backs on God.

And so God is going to visit them with judgment and he is angry with them. But this judgment on Israel is not the end of the story. So look at the first word of verse 10. Yet.

Yet. Yet. And that little word points us forward to something that is yet to come. There's a day in the future, Hosea says.

There's a day in the future when the number of the children of Israel shall be like sand of the sea which cannot be measured or numbered. Do you remember that promise?

God had promised Abraham that very thing. And he says, that is what is going to happen. God is not going to go back on his word. He's a God who can be trusted. And yet there will be judgment on Israel.

[19:06] They will be punished for their waywardness, their promiscuity, their spiritual adultery. And yet the promise still stands. The covenant still stands. The Israelites, they will be like the sand of the sea which cannot be measured on number.

And in the place where it's said to them, you are not my people, it should be said to them, children of the living God. And you say, when is that going to happen and how is that going to happen?

The Bible tells us, doesn't it, in the New Testament, that in Galatians chapter 4 verse 4, in the fullness of time, when the time had fully come, God sends his son into the world, born into a woman, made under the law.

to redeem those under the law that we might receive adoption as sons. John in his gospel, right at the start of his gospel, says that the word came into the world.

He who made the world came into the world and the world didn't recognize him. He came unto his own people and his own people did not receive him. But to as many as did receive him, he says to them, he gave the right to become children of God.

[20:20] Children of the living God, not born of blood or the will of the flesh or the will of man, but born of God. And so do you see, this is where we enter the story.

We enter the story through Jesus and by faith in Jesus, God owns us tonight as his sons and daughters. We're no different to the Israelites.

We are no more faithful than they were. We chase after other gods. But through faith in Jesus and what Jesus has done on the cross, God brings us into his family.

But not only that, he wants us to know that at an experiential level. He wants you to feel accepted by him.

And so not only, Paul says, does he send Jesus into the world that we might be redeemed and be adopted into the family, but he sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts that we might cry, Abba, Father. [ 21 : 33 ] It's what little kids say, isn't it? Phoebe's at that age, isn't it, where I come through the door and she runs full pelt at me and shouts, Daddy.

Do you see how lovely that is? But that is what God wants you to know of how he feels about you. It's a silly story, but there's a man who walks past a bookstore in London. A slightly strange guy and he looks in the window and there's a book in the window with the title How to Hug. And he's being something of a romantic. He goes in and he buys the book. And it's a remarkable disappointment to him because it's a one volume of a massive dictionary covering the words How to Hug.

And it wasn't quite what he was looking for. And I think maybe that's been your experience of coming to church. You come with a great sense of need.

[ 22 : 38 ] You come with your questions and your desires and you come wanting to meet with God. And you want to meet with God only to discover something as dry as a dictionary.

And it's amazing, isn't it, how people turn to religion in a time of crisis, whether it's national or personal. And many people have tried religion only to be profoundly disappointed.

And turning to religion is like wanting a hug and finding a dictionary. And so as we saw this morning, as we see again tonight, religion will never meet your greatest need because God wants to give you a hug, if I can put it like that.

He wants to embrace you in Christ. He doesn't want to keep you at arm's length. He invites you into his family, invites you into his arms, he invites you onto his lap.

And he wants you to know experientially that you are a son or a daughter of the living God dearly loved because of Jesus. Do you know that? Or have you just got religion?

[ 23 : 44 ] God's last word in this chapter is really a word of hope. Here is something that you rarely see. Here is a happy ending. Normally in a relationship that I've described in Hosea 1, there's normally bitterness from there, the breakdown of a marriage.

There are grudges that are kept. There is conflict and deep scars. very occasionally with a divorced couple there is such a cooling off that they get to the point of indifference.

But rarely in my experience do you see a couple get back together and get restored to the point of passion and romance and the intimacy that they had at first. But that is what Jesus promises to do for us.

there is a redeemer. And the redeemer's job is to fix that which is broken. And when he fixes that relationship that is broken, it is stronger than it ever was before.

And that is what God wants to do. He is inviting us back into that kind of relationship with intimacy with him through Jesus. Now just skip with me as we finish to chapter 3 in verse 1.

[ 25 : 00 ] Let me give you a sneak preview of what's to come and see how the story pans out. The Lord said to me go again love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress even as the Lord loves the children of Israel.

Love her again. Love her again. God doesn't say to Hosea go and rebuke her. He doesn't say go and take revenge on her.

This woman has ruined their relationship. She's broken his heart. He doesn't say go and give her a hard time. He doesn't say go and restore her because her life is a mess.

No, he says go and show your love to the loveless. It's unconditional. Go and love her. Even though she's loved by another man and is an adulteress go and love her and there's no stronger statement of God's love.

God's unconditional love for sinners than that anywhere in the Bible. And so can you see tonight that God is passionately, jealously, furiously in love with his people?

[ 26 : 22 ] Do you understand that? That is why he is angry with us. love is always angry. You cannot be indifferent when those you love are destroying themselves.

That makes you angry, doesn't it? The psalmist tells us that God is angry with the sinner every day. You see, anger and love are not opposites. Indifference is the opposite to love.

And God is not indifferent to us. He's not indifferent to the way that we treat one another. He's not indifferent to the way that we treat him. He cares passionately.

He cares so passionately that he sent his son Jesus into the world to save us. So we deserve nothing but his angry punishment because of our sin. But God doesn't give us what our sin deserves.

He reaches out to us again in Christ and he welcomes us back. Almost finished. Right at the end of the Bible.

[ 27 : 28 ] God's people are described right at the end of the Bible and not described as the unfaithful people that we know ourselves to be. But do you remember how God's people are described at the end of Revelation?

They are described as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. Let us rejoice and be glad, says John, and give him the glory for the wedding of the Lamb has come and the bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean was given to her to wear. That's grace, isn't it? It was given to her to wear. It's all of grace.

Listen to what Martin Luther says in The Freedom of the Christian talking about this very relationship. He says, who then can fully appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can understand the riches of the glory of his grace?

Here this rich and divine bridegroom, Christ, marries this poor wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot now destroy her since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him, and she has that righteousness in Christ her husband, of which she might boast of as her own, and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, if I have sinned, yet Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine, and all mine is his.

[ 28 : 52 ] That's it, doesn't it? Glenn and I got married at 23. 23. Said these words, all that I have, I share with you.

What did I have at 23? I had a student loan. I didn't. What do you have at 23? You look, isn't it, when Hannah and Will got willing to go to get married, all that I have, I share with you.

What have they got? An overdraft at the bank. I'm married to Christ. I put my faith in him. When I put my trust in Jesus and take him to be my Lord and Savior, all that I have is his.

What? What do I have to contribute to my salvation? The only thing I bring is my sin that I need to be saved from. And guess what he does? He takes all of it, all the filth, all the unfaithfulness, all the shame and all the pain and all the guilt, and he shoulders it.

And he shoulders it upon the cross and he takes it upon himself. All that I have he takes and all that he has he gives to me. The beautiful, perfect, winsome righteousness which is so attractive he wraps it around me like a robe.

[ 30 : 10 ] And so God sees me and you tonight if you put your trust in Christ, not in your sin but in his son. God sees me in Christ. He sees me as a son or a daughter. I'm accepted in the beloved and that is what we long for.

And if you're not a Christian tonight that's what we long for you. That you might experientially know what it is to come into God's family. To know God's embrace in Christ.

To know yourself to be a son or a daughter of the living God. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we thank you for this remarkable story from your word and we want to pray that this series would deeply help us and challenge us.

And we thank you for the way that you reveal yourself so strikingly and so dramatically as a passionate lover. And your love is not sentimental. It's not simply theoretical.

But the love of God in Jesus Christ is warm is jealous is furious and you want the best for us Lord.

[ 31 : 25 ] And we thank you that we know that because you've not spared your only son but have given him up for us all so that through him we might be accepted and brought in and our sins might be forgiven.

And so we want to pray tonight for those known to us maybe even here who've not closed yet with the Lord Jesus Christ and put their trust in him. We pray that they might do so even at this very moment and that they might know the joy they might know the relief of what it is to be right with you and to be loved by you.

We ask it in Jesus name Amen. Amen. We're going to sing to close this hymn loved with everlasting love led by grace that love to know and verse 2 you might think oh it's kind of Victorian sentimentalism but what it's saying is that when our eyes are opened to the Lord Jesus Christ and

what God has done for us in the Lord Jesus everything changes it's just not the religious section of our life but all of our life and all of creation so we suddenly see that the world around us heaven above is softer blue earth around is rich and green something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen songs of birds and sweetness grow flowers with deeper beauty shine and that's saying to you that this is our father's world and as Christians that's what we recognise so it's not sentimentalism at all let's stand and sing loved with everlasting love