

THE AMAZING LOVE OF GOD

Hosea (selected Scriptures)

Today we are going to begin a twelve message series that I pray will prove to be an exciting journey for all of us. We are going on a spiritual safari to what some have called “the dark continent of Scripture”. And on this safari I pray that we will capture many spiritual truths to take home with us. Not for show, as we would mount a big game trophy on our family room wall, but for hiding in the closet of our heart, that we might grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. And I pray that you will not miss a single country on our trip.

So where do you think that the “dark continent of Scripture” is? Well, where would you guess is the least read portion of God’s Word, the least familiar to most believers? If you would guess the last twelve books of the Old Testament, you’d be right. These books have been designated by many as the Minor Prophets. Now, as a group, the twelve men called the Minor Prophets wrote to the entire nation of Israel. But let me clear up something about Israel that could be a little confusing. After Solomon’s death the tribes of Israel began to war with one another and the nation wound up being divided into two sections. So, church splits did not start with New Harmony Baptist breaking off from Harmony Baptist 150 years ago. Their roots go all the way back to about 930 BC. But the nation of Israel was divided, and when you read of this division in Scripture, the 10 Northern tribes are called Israel and the 2 Southern tribes are called Judah. So depending on the context sometimes the name Israel refers to the entire nation and sometimes it refers to the Northern tribes only.

But the men called the Minor Prophets wrote to both the Northern and the Southern tribes of Israel. And they wrote during a time span of about 400 years, from the time of the Assyrian empire, through the Babylonians, to the Persians. And the phrase “dark continent of Scripture” really fits well with this period of Israel’s history, for it was just as dark. But the name “Minor Prophets” is misleading, for their overall message to God’s people is the very same as the four Major Prophets, which are Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. The only reason for the word “minor” is that they are smaller in size. There are a total of 67 chapters in the Minor Prophets, which is one more than the book of Isaiah. But the fact is, the 67 chapters of the Minor Prophets are probably the least read chapters in the entire Bible. And in some of these chapters we read of a historical event or a prophecy or a command from God that is totally unique in all of Scripture.

And so in this series I want to take one minor prophet each week and share with you the main message of his book. So as you can see, our study will not be in depth at all. But it will hopefully give you a glimpse into the lives of God’s people during those days, and of God’s message through each of these men. And from every message I pray that we can draw some up-to-date applications for our lives as well.

Turn, please, to the book of Hosea 1:1-2:1. Hosea was one of the three minor prophets that wrote to the Northern tribes, to Israel, the other two being Amos and Jonah. And in the verses we’ve just read we see the Reader’s Digest version of the whole book. And the one, overarching truth of the book of Hosea is **the amazing love of God**. You see, if any group of people had ever trampled on the grace of God, it was Israel. In their short existence, which was from 931 to 722 BC, 209 years, they had a total of 19 kings, and every one of them was

evil. There was not one king that followed Jehovah. And the nation directly followed in their wicked footsteps. And when you read the history books of 1&2 Kings and see just how far they fell away from God during that period, you marvel that He had as much patience with them as He did before they were conquered and taken away into Assyrian captivity. But even as God pronounced judgment upon them, He followed up with the promise that He would forgive them and restore them in the end.

Now, I want us to take a bird's eye survey of Hosea's message and rejoice in this amazing love of God. From time to time God directed His prophets to declare His message with a personal, vivid, visual illustration. God told Isaiah to walk naked and barefoot for three years as a sign of the Assyrian conquest of Egypt (Isaiah 20). God told Ezekiel that He was going to take away from him the desire of his eyes, his wife, as a sign of the coming judgment of His people. And the next day Ezekiel's wife died (Ezekiel 24). Think about how difficult it was for Isaiah and Ezekiel to fulfill such callings to be God's spokesmen.

Well, beloved, Hosea had a calling that ranks right up there with them. Look again at chapter 1:2a. God said to Hosea, "Go and marry a prostitute". Now, most Bible scholars agree that God was speaking with prolepsis here. That is, He was speaking with present tense language of a future occurrence. For instance, if you wanted to project the future football accomplishments of a five star high school running back you might say, "That boy's a Trent Richardson". And you would be saying, "He's going to be a great college running back". And in the same way, God said to Hosea, "Go marry a woman who is going to turn out to be a prostitute". In other words, in the kindest way I know how to say it, God said,

“Hosea, go marry a woman who one day will be a slut and break your heart. And also you must raise her children that she bears as the result of her trade”. Tell me, men, how would you like to be standing at the altar on your wedding day already knowing what a horrible mess you were getting yourself into? And to top it all, what if her name was Gomer? Sometimes the path that God calls us to walk is not an easy path.

But just like it was with Isaiah and Ezekiel, God has a lesson to teach Hosea and Israel through Hosea’s actions. God tells Hosea in verse 2 that just like Gomer will be unfaithful to him one day, so Israel has been unfaithful to God. Look at how God describes them in chapter 4:1-3 and 12. The people of God have lost all knowledge of God and His ways. And as a result they have fallen into all kinds of immoral behavior. They are swearing, lying, stealing, killing, and committing adultery. And in the forsaking of Jehovah they have turned to idol worship. And their sin is so prolific that even the land and the animals were about to suffer for it. With strong metaphor God says that the land was going to mourn and the birds, the beasts, and the fish would waste away, along with every human being. For you see, the sin of man has an effect upon all of the created order. And all the created order was about to experience misery that Israel would never have dreamed to be possible.

Friends, make no mistake about it. The wages of sin is eternal death, eternal separation from God - hell. There is no worse punishment for sin than that. But the wages of sin is more than just eternal death; it is pain and heartache in this life as well. Now, I’m not saying that every unsaved person lives in total misery. Some are affluent and live lives of relative ease, at least physical ease. In fact, that was the case with

many in Israel during these days. But that is not the case with most. You just cannot sin and not suffer the consequences. God says, "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). You can't fill your body with alcohol and drugs and smoke and too much food and not suffer. We all know that. But you can't you fill your mind with filth from the TV and internet and the theater and not suffer, either. But we all don't know that. How does that hurt me, preacher? Because all of that sinful behavior that you see and hear poisons your mind with Satan's lies about how to find real joy in life. And poisoned minds lead to poisoned attitudes and actions, and poisoned attitudes and actions lead to poisoned, miserable relationships.

And beloved, you can't substitute the worship of Jesus with His people on Sundays with your idols – extra sleep and family time and going to grandmas – you can't do this and not suffer. Now, please here me! I'm not preaching against these things. I do have better sense than that. It's no sin to sleep in. And it's important that we make time for family and grandma. But I am preaching against using God's time for sleeping in and family time and going to grandma's, for many people choose God's time for these things when they could choose another time just as well. And they suffer spiritually for it. But Israel had played the harlot, forsaken God and His ways and would soon be living in misery.

But in addition to miserable natural consequences of sin, God said that He was going to send His judgment upon Israel for their sin. In chapter 1:4 God said that He would bring an end to the house of Israel. In verse 6 God says that He would no longer have mercy on Israel, and in verse 9 God says that He will no longer be Israel's God. And he expands upon this judgment in chapter 10:13-15. And of course, all of this

happened just as God said it would. Israel was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC, taken into captivity, and the 10 Northern tribes were never liberated nor heard of again. But God was trying to shake Israel through Hosea and Gomer before all of this happened by saying, “Wake up, My children! What Gomer has done to Hosea is exactly what you are doing to Me. Repent before it’s too late!” God expresses this desire in chapter 14:1-3. And may I say that God is graciously calling every backslidden child of His to repentance today. “Whom the Lord loves He chastens”, the writer of Hebrews says. And He chastens us for the very same reason He chastened Israel, to prevent further sin and the heartache it brings, and to prevent His judgment upon us.

But as we said, Israel refused to repent and the hammer of God’s judgment fell. They were destroyed, scattered all over the world, hated, and persecuted beyond imagination. And they remained scattered for 2670 years, until Israel was rebirthed as a nation in 1948. But even now, we know that the Jews still live in peril and fear, surrounded by Muslims whose passion in life is to see them destroyed once more. And they would be except for one thing – and that is God’s amazing love for them. Look back in chapter 1:10 - 2:1. Despite Israel’s total rejection of Jehovah God – the One Who birthed her, Who provided for her every need for 40 years in the wilderness, Who blessed her beyond measure with the Promised Land of Canaan – despite her rejection of the One Who loved her so much, God never rejected her. And He promised that one day she would be fully restored. She would be numbered as the sands of the seas. She would be His people once again, and He would once more pour out His mercy upon her. Listen to what God says about His people in chapter 14:4-7.

Now, this great manifestation of God's love for Israel is yet to take place. It will come at the end of the Tribulation Period, when Jesus returns in glory to rescue Israel from the Antichrist and his plans to annihilate her. At that time Israel will finally accept Him as their Messiah and He will restore her to perfect fellowship and blessings forever and ever. But God gives Israel a picture of His love and forgiveness through Hosea's love and forgiveness for Gomer. Look at chapter 3:1-3. We do not know the length of time that passed since Gomer had deserted Hosea and began her life of prostitution again. But sin in her life had taken its toll. Somehow Gomer had become a slave and now she was being sold on the market.

But see how far into the depths of depravity Gomer had fallen. The Bible says that her purchase price was fifteen shekels of silver and one and one-half homers of barley, which was animal feed. Now, to put this in perspective, back in Moses' day the price of a common slave was 30 shekels of silver (Exodus 21:32), and there's no telling how high inflation had driven up the price 700 years later in Hosea's time. But let's just assume prices were up 50%, which is extremely low. But at that rate of inflation the very most Gomer was worth was one third the price of a common slave plus a homer and a half of animal feed, which was 16½ bushels. So in today's dollars, Gomer cost Hosea \$65 with some animal feed thrown in for good measure. Pretty cheap.

I want us to think for just a moment about the emotions that Hosea must have felt at his first sight of Gomer, standing on the slave block before a crowd of would-be buyers. To be worth so little, what a wretched sight she must have been! Her life of prostitution had taken its toll. She was no longer attractive, but looked much older than her years. She no doubt felt bitterness toward men and felt guilt before God. She had

absolutely zero self esteem. And her bitterness and guilt and self deprecation were written all over her face. She was a pitiful sight, a gnarled lump of humanity that was good for nothing – one that most people would say should be put out of sight and out of mind. But God said to Hosea, “Go buy her off the slave block, love her with the love that you first had for her, and live with her until death do you part”. Now, mind you, she has not repented of her sins toward her husband at this point. She has had no desire to come back to him. Think what a difficult thing God was asking Hosea to do!

But also consider what others who were there that day were thinking when Hosea said, “I want to buy her.” Think of the laughter and the ridicule that he must have endured. “Hey, Hosea! Get a grip! Don’t you remember what she did to you? You are absolute nuts if you go through with this”. But Hosea did not waiver. He obeyed God, bought Gomer out of slavery, took her home and restored her to a place of love, honor, and respect as his wife. He said to Gomer, “I don’t care what you’ve done. I don’t care how you’ve hurt me. I forgive you”.

Oh, what a picture of Jesus’ love for Israel! And what a picture of Jesus’ love for you and for me! For you and I were born in sin and rebellion against God. And from the first time we willfully did what we knew to be wrong as a child – from that moment we became accountable for that sin and condemned to eternal death. Death and hell were our certain destiny. But in His love Jesus left His throne in glory and came into this world and died on an old rugged cross, fully paying our sin debt to God. And the book of Hebrews says that Jesus has entered into the holy of holies in Heaven with his own blood and has declared to His Father, “Father, here is the sacrifice for the sins of the ones that I love. Forgive them for My blood’s

sake". And the Father said, "Yes, My Son. I'll do it, because your blood is sufficient!"

So that's the message of Hosea to you today. The message; that God loves you just as He loves His chosen people. And just as He is going to come again and touch their hearts and cause them to run to Him as their Messiah, and just as He will be their husband and love them for all eternity, He desires the same relationship with you. But friends, God has said that we must personally respond to His great love extended to us. Look at Hosea's words to Israel as we close: (Hosea 6:1-3). Hosea says, "Come, let us repent! Let us turn back to God. He has judged us, but He will forgive us. So let us pursue knowing Him with all of our hearts". Is God calling you to repentance toward Him today? Do you need to be saved by trusting Jesus as your only hope of eternal life? Do you need to come back to Him as His child? If you are saying, "Yes", His promise to you in verse 3 is, "My going forth is established as the morning. As surely as the sun rises each day, I will come to you, and just as surely as rain falls upon the earth". I pray that if Jesus is calling you will come to Him today.