

Scriptures: Luke 11:1-13; Hosea 1:2-10

God Moves in Mysterious Ways

Our summer series, "Prophet Margins," has had us looking at various Old Testament prophets. The first week we looked at Elisha, and then we spent two weeks with Amos. This week we're switching gears, and will be spending some time with Hosea. Hosea's an interesting guy, to put it mildly, and he puts up with a lot! If you have your Bible, or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Hosea 1:2-10. I'll be reading from the New International Version today. **Read Hosea 1:2-10.**

English poet William Cowper was a contemporary of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. In 1773, Cowper wrote a poem, which later became a hymn. He writes:

"God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea, And rides upon the storm. Deep in unfathomable mines Of never failing skill; He treasures up His bright designs, and works His sovereign will. Ye fearful saints fresh courage take, The clouds ye so much dread Are big with mercy, and shall break In blessings on your head. Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face. His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding ev'ry hour; The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flow'r. Blind unbelief is sure to err, And scan His work in vain; God is His own interpreter, and He will make it plain."¹

Sometimes there are things we read in Holy Scripture that really make us uncomfortable. We may read things like this, and wonder, "Why would God say to do this?" Or "Why did the ancient church decide this was Scripture, while other books were not?" Hosea may have thought the same thing! To be sure, Hosea's home life is sorrowful. It's important for us to realize and to know, that God knows what He's doing, and He knows what's best for us!

God's Strange Call to Hosea

Hosea was a contemporary of Amos. Scholars believe Hosea's ministry spanned close to forty years, all spent in the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In fact, of all the prophetic writers in Holy Scripture, Hosea is the only one who was a native of the Northern Kingdom. The time period Hosea lived in was similar to ours.

It was full of strife, wars, rumors of wars, and political intrigue. After King Jeroboam II died, who was king during Amos' ministry, six different kings ruled over Israel over the course of a 25 year time span. Four of them gained the throne by murdering their predecessor. In the world today, we'd call that a coup. Only one would

¹ H. S. Milford, editor, *The Complete Poetical Works of William Cowper*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), page 455.

inherit the throne from his dad, and the final one was carried away by the Assyrians. The Northern Kingdom would be carried into exile in Assyria by the time Hosea's prophetic work was finished.

"When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, 'Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord,'" (Hos. 1:2) we're told. Talk about dysfunctional! Now, I want to make a point here – this is not your typical marriage. God doesn't call us to marry someone who's not going to be faithful to us. He wants a husband to honor and love his wife unconditionally – like Christ loves the Church. And He also wants the wife to love and honor her husband unconditionally – just like the Church is supposed to love and cling to Christ.

Israel – God's Bride

The reason God tells Hosea to do this is in the last half of the verse. Did you catch it? "Because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord." So, God's going to use Hosea's marriage – it's a sad marriage – as an allegory, or symbol, of the relationship going on between God and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. In the New Testament, the Church is called "the Bride of Christ." You've heard of that. In the Old Testament – Jesus hadn't come yet to save us all and to restore right relationships – God called the ancient Israelites His bride.

They were supposed to have a covenant relationship with each other. That's what a modern-day marriage is, even if it's a secular one. The husband and the wife, they make an agreement with each other that they'll be present and supportive of each other. So how do the ancient Israelites – that nation – commit "adultery in departing from the Lord"? Well, they were worshiping that golden calf in Bethel, for starters. We usually don't think of idolatry – worshiping other gods – as adultery, or unfaithfulness in marriage, but the Scripture here suggests that that's how God sees it!

"So Hosea married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son," (verse 3). Today we might say Hosea's a glutton for punishment, but he listens to God, and does what He tells him to do. He marries the lady, and they have a child together. "Then the Lord said to Hosea, 'Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel,'" (verses 4-5).

Weird Names

Here's the first instance of Hosea telling us that God's going to get rid of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Last week we talked a little about word-plays in Amos. Hosea has some, too, especially in the names. He names his son "Jezreel," apparently after a valley in the region. But the name means "God scatters" in Hebrew. It doesn't

sound like the nicest name, does it? Stay tuned – the meanings of the names Hosea gives the other kids are even worse!

“Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, ‘Call her Lo-Ruhamah, for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them – not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the Lord their God,’” (verses 6-7). Something I want to point out here – some Bible scholars suggest that the second and third children born to Gomer were not fathered by Hosea, on account of the way his name is omitted unlike in verse 3. If that’s the case, a lot of the stuff we see people doing on the Maury Povich show or Jerry Springer, isn’t anything new.

We also have another word play here, with the little girl’s name, Lo-Ruhamah. It literally means, “not loved.” Can you imagine naming a kid that? If someone named a kid something like this today, we’d think they were nuts! God’s using the girl’s name to make the point that He’s not going to show compassion – He’s not going to have pity – on the Northern Kingdom any longer, but promises to give it to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Sibling Rivalry?

How do you think the first hearers of this responded? Those Northern Kingdom Israelites split off from the Southern Kingdom of Judah roughly 200 years earlier because of political disagreements with King Solomon’s son, Rehoboam. Now God’s telling them they’re “not loved,” while the folks in the South are. I’d imagine many of the northern folks heard this and got pretty angry.

There’s nothing like stirring the pot on some sibling rivalry! Those of you who have brothers or sisters, I know you know what I mean. Especially when it comes to Mom or Dad having a “favorite!” In the instance we’re reading of today, it’s pretty clear that Judah’s the “favored” child, in comparison to Israel!

“After Gomer had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son,” (verse 8), we’re told next. Notice again, Hosea isn’t mentioned as being the father. I suspect if you spend some time later this week reading the rest of this book, you’ll probably come to the conclusion that the Bible scholars have regarding that. It’s a relatively short read – only fourteen chapters long, and we’ve already read the first chapter today. I’ll tell you this – there is a glimmer of hope towards the end.

Words Have Power

Notice what God tells Hosea to name Gomer’s son. “Call him Lo-Ammi, for you are not my people, and I am not your God,” (verse 9). Poor kid! Lo-Ammi – another

word play – means “not my people.” The way someone might say it today, would be, “not my kid.” Words have power!

When I was young and dealing with some not so nice kids in school, my parents taught me a rhyme. You may have heard something along the same lines. “Sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never harm me.” Have you heard that before? It’s a nice sentiment, but it’s absolutely not true. Our words have the potential to cause great harm.

Can you imagine a little boy, Gomer’s son in this case, going by the name “Not my kid?” You know, they have a specific word they use for that. I’m sure you know what that is – I’m not going there because it’s just not something nice or uplifting to say. Those kinds of words – labels actually – have the potential to leave lasting scars on the lives of individual people. The point God is trying to make, using some very blunt language, is that His people had turned their backs on Him, and He was quite frankly, tired of it. He was done.

God Divorces Israel

You may have heard it said before by theologians that God “divorced” Israel. That’s what this boils down to. He’s done having them pay lip service to Him, He isn’t their God – they’re worshiping Baal, a Canaanite idol, and that golden calf. Let’s be clear here about what this idol worship entailed. I think we need to clarify this because for the most part, the major part of the Church in general today is Biblically illiterate. They don’t read it with any kind of consistency or daily habit.

These Canaanite idols those ancient people kept worshiping in God’s place required all sorts of wicked worship practices. In some cases, the people even sacrificed their firstborn child as a burnt offering to these various gods. Can you imagine murdering your child because some kook in a fancy robe told you that the stone statue of a bull, or of a person, or of some other animal, told him you were supposed to do it? That’s the kind of sick stuff that was going down in the land of Israel. And God didn’t like it one bit!

We should be able to recognize that, right? God values human life so highly, that He was willing to lay aside glory, to take the form of a man – Jesus Christ – to show us how we ought to live and treat others, and then to take that One, Perfect Human, and put Him on a cross to die for you and for me, and for every person who ever lived or ever will. Life is precious to the Author of Life! And because of His great Love for us – His desire to give us life – He seals the promise by leaving the borrowed tomb empty on Easter morning!

Co-heirs with Christ

Even before Jesus came to do His greatest work, He reveals a hope to these ancient Israelites to whom Hosea was talking. He says, “Yet the Israelites will be like 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 ‘sons of the living God,’” (verse 10). Do you know who is called “children of God,” New Hope Church?

John the Apostle wrote in the very first chapter of his book, “He [Jesus] came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him. Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God – children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God,” (Jn 1:11-13). Who in Scripture is called “children of God?” We are! It’s the Church! He has brought us into His family. Isn’t that cool?

And it’s not just a sort of “step-sibling” situation. We’re adopted and as solid in God’s family as Jesus Christ Himself is. Listen to what Paul tells the Romans. He says in part:

“For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may also share in His glory,” (Rom. 8:14-17).

Friends, that’s great news! We aren’t just treated – or going to be treated – like hired hands. Jesus is King, right? If we’re loving and following Him with all our hearts, we’re “co-heirs,” that means we get everything He gets. He’s the King, so what does that make us? We also become kings and queens – and I’m not referring to drama here! He’ll have us with Him, ruling with Him, when He comes again and sets all things right!

Prayer: Living God, You raise us to fullness of being in sharing the life of Christ together. Teach us to pray and grant us hopeful persistence in seeking Your will and Your way, that by the power of the Spirit, love and faithfulness may meet to disarm the powers of the world. Amen.