

The Gloriously Shocking Unveiling of Grace

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Grab your Bibles and let's go to Hosea, Hosea 2. What a beautiful and penetrating picture of God's saving grace through his Son Jesus Christ we find in the Old Testament book of Hosea. And you know, you need different things at different times but just this past week how the truth of this text pierced my heart anew and very very deeply with deep humility and deep gratitude for indeed the deep deep love of Jesus.

Hosea 2:14. We're talking about the gloriously shocking unveiling of grace. Hosea 2:14, the prophet writes one verse,

14 Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Bring her into the wilderness And speak kindly to her.

As a backdrop, stay in chapter 2 and look at verse 5 and let's see what Israel has been doing. Figuratively and using this illustration of the marriage relationship, adultery equaling the rebellion of Israel, he's talking about her spiritual adultery and aligning it with physical adultery so he says in verse 5 of Hosea 2, "For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, Who give me my bread and my water, My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.'" Israel is chasing after the idols of the people. Often Israel would see what the other nations were doing and how well they were getting along and maybe they thought, "Well, we're not doing as good," so they would go looking for and began to become accustomed to the worship and the service of the Baals and other false idols that were in the surrounding territories and here Israel is in hardened, black, spiritual adultery, even to the point where she says, "I will go after my lovers," verse 5, and she has even given these foreign lovers, these idols in this wicked rebellion she's pursuing, credit for meeting her needs. She says, "They give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink."

Then further in verse 8, "she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil, And lavished on her silver and gold, Which they used for Baal." God Jehovah says, "I'm the one who blessed you. I'm the one who birthed you. I'm the one who called your father out of Ur of the Chaldees. I'm the one who sustained you in the wilderness. I'm the one who has given you everything you have. I've been a faithful

husband to you, Israel, and you take the riches I have put on you and you use it to worship Baal."

Then verses 11 through 13, "I will also put an end to all her gaiety, Her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths And all her festal assemblies." Now here's what's interesting and it shows us how nothing has changed in approaching 3,000 years. Israel was in abhorrent, willful, spiritual idolatry yet when Israel would go and worship the idols of the land, she would throw Jehovah's name on it. She would intermingle and syncretize the worship of the true God of heaven, the God of Israel, with the false pagan gods that she really loved and clung to because Israel thought, "Well, if we just throw a little bit of Jehovah on there to make it all okay." Does that sound anything like modern Christianity to you? "We'll throw a little Bible on there, throw a little cosmetic covering on it, and it will still be just us doing our own thing, following our own lust, but maybe that will make it okay. We're serving the Lord this way." No, that makes it all the much more wicked.

Verse 12, he says, "I will destroy her vines and fig trees, Of which she said, 'These are my wages Which my lovers,'" again she gives her lovers credit here, "'my lovers have given me.' And I will make them a forest, And the beasts of the field will devour them. I will punish her for the days of the Baals When she used to offer sacrifices to them And adorn herself with her earrings and jewelry." He uses the figurative image of a harlot in wanton indulgence of her immoralities, dressing herself up to be alluring to her lovers. He says spiritually that's what Israel does. "'And follow her lovers, so that she forgot Me,' declares the LORD."

So when you come to chapter 2, verse 14, we see that God's holy justice has had center stage and justice performance was both awe-inspiring and terrifying. Israel's sin is a black darkness against the white immutable holiness of God. Israel's guilt is blatant and clear. God's wrath against her both justified and irrefutable. And we like Israel in our sins, are guilty and we are bowed low before the thundering immutable justice of God, and in that dark, guilty, barren, woeful place, God unveils to us the wonders and glories of grace. This is radically unlike what you think would be logical. This is radically unlike what you think should happen next or would expect. It's shaking. It's shocking. It's glorious. It's unexpected.

Look at it. First of all, notice how he woos the most unworthy in her state. God says in verse 14, the first line, "Therefore, behold, I will allure her." The tone now changes from verse 3 of chapter 2, "I will strip her naked And expose her as on the day when she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, Make her like desert land And slay her with thirst." Then look at verses 9 and 10, "Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time And My new wine in its season. I will also take away My wool and My flax Given to cover her nakedness. And then I will uncover her lewdness In the sight of her lovers, And no one will rescue her out of My hand." Then he just threatens again in verse 13, "I will punish her for the days of the Baals When she used to offer sacrifices to them And forgot Me." So the tone now is going to suddenly change from all of those dark clouds of threatening and judgment to the glorious light of free grace and mercy. We'll see it in just

a moment but even the harsh consequences of her rebellion are part of God's alluring grace that he bestows on Israel in love.

He says in verse 14, "Therefore, I will allure her." She is, in effect, in some far away place, in some dark den of ill-repute, involved in the vile immoralities with her lover and her faithful husband has been looking for her. He finds her there. He forces the door open. She sits trembling in fear and he comes to her, not to punish, not to condemn, not to threaten but to allure her, to win her back. That phrase means with sweet, gentle and caring gestures he comes to her.

You think, "Well, how does this fit?" I mean, when you understand the darkness of her sin, the deliberate spiritual adultery of her heart, how would God picture it as this pursuing husband? How would he do this? Well, my friend, this is grace. Against the dark wickedness of their sin, we can see the wondrous glory of grace. Man is so evil that imposing judgment will never turn him back to God. Did you hear that? That's an important phrase. Man is so evil that the threat of imposing judgment will not turn him back to God. In Genesis 8:21, for example, "The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.'" God is saying, "Man is so completely evil, I'm not going to win any of them if I just judge them for what they rightfully deserve to be judged for." In the face of this depth of spiritual adultery and willful indulgence and forsaking of God, God says, "I will turn him by another way." It seems it should be the opposite but that's what grace is, it's opposite of man's natural inclination. And David understood this, David the Psalmist said in Psalm 25:11, "For Your name's sake, O LORD, Pardon my iniquity, for it is great." David didn't say out of my worth, out of my repentance, out of my merit, out of what I've accomplished, out of I've turned over a new leaf for you, God. David said, "No, for the sake of the reputation of your very character. You're the God of grace, for that sake, Lord, you redeem me. Pardon my iniquities."

Your sins are so great, one would think they would make you the object of God's wrath yet behold the wonders of the covenant of grace. It renders you the object of his mercy and compassion. God comes to adulterous Israel, hunts her down in the midst of her willful indulgence in her wickedness and from that point he says, "I'm going to woo you back to me. I'm going to draw you back."

There is a real application here for those of us who are already saved, those of us who've already committed to serve God because, you see, sometimes you and I feel as though we have as blind a heart as the wicked have. Sometimes we feel as if the stubbornness and rebellion of our heart is as equal to the most vile rebel. Sometimes we feel as we have as hard a heart as the most grievous sinner. But does this mean that we're not his child and that he's not our Father? No, a thousand times no. I will do what the text says, I will reason contrary to that which seems logical. I do believe that he's my Father and I will run to him in repentance and trust him to open these blind eyes, to soften this hardened heart and to sanctify this unclean spirit. Have you learned to do that, child of God? Run to him. The moment you turn and open the door to forsake that room of rotten, blackened

sin and rebellion, the moment you turn and open the door, he's standing there saying, "I've been waiting for you. I've been waiting for you."

Romans 5:20, "The Law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more." As a child of God and you find yourself not walking with God the way you ought and the guilt becomes weighing in on your shoulders, I'm telling you that the law of God condemns you but the grace of God to cleanse you and take you back is far greater still. It always has been. It always will be. This is a continual truth. When he saves us, he keeps us saved and the bounding grace of God toward his own just keeps coming and coming and coming and coming on our behalf.

He said, "I will allure." It's the idea of enticing. "I'm going to entice her back." I can just see in my mind's eye the picture the prophet wants you to get, this woman perhaps naked except covering herself in the clothes of her den of iniquity, and she's shaking and she doesn't know what's coming next. Men had all authority over their wives in that day. And she's trembling and instead of anything else, he says, "No, I'm going to put all my best efforts, all the powers and the strengths I have, to allure you back." Think about that. That's what God is saying to you, sinner. That's what God is saying to you, rebel. What a picture of grace.

The word "allure or entice" unfortunately has a negative connotation. Today it's used of men of impure motives and by wicked seductresses in the world, but that's tragic because here it pictures the sweet and gracious way God deals with his elect.

Three thoughts here. Specifically he says, "I'm going to come to her. I'm going to lure her back by gradually unfolding before her eyes all the beauty and the excellencies of my infinite goodness and my great forgiveness and lovingkindness I have for her. I'm going to put that before her heart. I will array before her heart the exceeding glory of the riches of my grace." He says, "In the midst of her deep guilt and rottenness and vileness, I'm going to come to come to her and overwhelm her with the truth of the great lovingkindness and forgiveness I have."

Not only will he gradually unfold the beauties and excellencies of his goodness and lovingkindness in grace to her, secondly, he says, "I'm going to outlove all of her former lovers combined." Now, this is God speaking here. "I will become more alluring than all of them put together." He doesn't just come with a mighty rod and begin to beat that woman in that bed and say, "What are you doing? I'll kill you if you do this again!" He doesn't do that. He puts it on himself. He takes the weight of the covenant relationship on himself and he cries to her and says, "I'm going to be such a man that you will never again desire these lovers and you will turn from your heart to me." That's what God said he was going to do. A picture of grace.

In effect, he says, "Did those foreign lovers give you comfort? Then I will give you more. Did those foreign lovers give you gain? Then I will give you more. Did all of those foreign lovers give you pleasure? Then I will give you more. Did those foreign lovers

give you honor, respect? Then I will give you more." It's the picture of Gomer in the narrative of Hosea, Gomer is Hosea's wife, and she is this unclean, vile, chasing after wickedness harlot and she comes toward the end of her life and she's no longer at all attractive to anyone. One of her lovers has taken her and sold her into the slave market and there she stands on the slave block just haggard, rags on her. She no longer has an attractive figure. Her face is torn and worn and old and sagging. Her hair is matted and unkempt and everything about her is unattractive. And when she comes up on the block, all the men bidding on the slaves that day laugh and scoff and say, "I wouldn't put a penny on that old blankety-blank." And then Jesus walks in and pays the highest price ever been paid for any slave or any groups of slaves ever sold in the slave market before. And her heart is so touched. He wins her back. Allures her back to himself.

He said, "I will outbid them all. I'll get you back. I'm going to outlove them all." Then suddenly and then after suddenly increasingly she realizes, "I have more enjoyments and more advantages in this man than in all the others." And that's the way the child of God does. When we come to Jesus Christ, we begin to learn that the pleasures of God are so much greater than the pleasures of sin. That's why the songwriter could write, "Jesus is all the world to me, my life, my joy, my all." That's why the songwriter could write, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace."

Not only does he come and say, "Gradually I'm going to unfold the beauties and the excellencies of my lovingkindness and changer her heart," not only does he say here, "That I will outlove and outbid all of her other lovers and she'll see that I've got more with this man than I could have in all those other lovers," he comes secretly, he comes by surprise. She's been doing this a long time, decades have passed. She's lived in vile pollution and immoralities in open rebellion against God and then suddenly he shows up. Isn't that the way God invades our lives? C. S. Lewis wrote a book about his conversion and he entitled it, "Surprised by Joy." It was a surprise. Suddenly he steals our hearts away before we even know what's happened. God's grace came rushing into our hearts unaware and it so ravishes our hearts that we run after the Lord.

Turn, if you will, real quick to John. Would you turn over there to this New Testament parallel truth, John 6, beginning in verse 41. In John 6:41, the Jews, the religious authorities, are grumbling about what Jesus is saying, "Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, 'I am the bread that came down out of heaven.' They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, 'I have come down out of heaven'?" They said, "You're just an ordinary guy. We know you. We know your parents. We know where you come from." Verse 43, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,'" that's it, woos, that's a wooing, "and I will raise him up on the last day." How is it that some come to treasure and joy and find their pleasures in God and others know the truths in their mind but they don't seem to be affected? Jesus said, "Don't argue about it. You can't come unless the Father who sent me draws you." Here Israel is pictured as the wayward sinner and the husband is pictured as the faithful one who goes after his own bride. Again, the idea of

election comes in so strongly because this one does not go and pursue other women, he pursues his own; he pursues the one he's had from the beginning, the one that is his.

Well, secondly, II. He brings them to see their need. He brings them to see their need. He doesn't just say in verse 14, "When I find her, and I'm going to find her, therefore, behold, I will allure her." He says, "I will bring her into the wilderness. Now, all of those terrible things we heard the prophet say the Lord was going to do back in chapter 2 of Hosea to Israel for her sin is this bringing her into the wilderness. This wilderness represents barrenness. It represents a hopelessness. It represents need and it represents lostness. What the prophet is saying is when God goes to find one, he's got to show that one how desperately barren and bankrupt they are until they come to him. This isn't punishment, it's a part of grace. You see, every truly converted soul understands there is a wilderness area on the farm of grace. He said, "I will bring her into the wilderness."

Where we hunt there's an area we call the sanctuary. You've heard me tell you this before. And what we call the sanctuary is because we don't ever go in there. We have one big thicket that we let the deer know we're not coming in there. Y'all can go in there and be safe. And it's a thicket, I mean, it's brambles and briars and honeysuckles, weeds. It's awful. As a matter of fact, I've gone through it a time or two and there are places where literally you have to get on your stomach and crawl to get through it. It might be 25, 30 acres or so and if I were to drop you down in the middle of it and you didn't know anything about the place, it could be bewildering. You would say, "I'm lost. I'm hopeless in here." But I know the land real well and on one side is a pipeline and if you get to the pipeline, you know the way back. If you go on another side, there's a logging road and it's kind of a triangle. If you hit the logging road, you know the way back. On the other side, there's a lake and a field. If you get to the lake and the field, you know the way back. So you're in the wilderness but your safety, your rescue is really all the way around you.

And that's what God does when he takes a soul into the wilderness, he's convicting them of sin, he's showing them their lostness, he's showing them their need and he brings them into a crushing, he brings them into a brokenness, and you may feel like, "Oh, the weight of this, I feel my offensiveness, I feel my lostness, I feel my worthiness of condemnation and judgment." But that's not condemnation and judgment, it's him alluring you to see that you need him. All he's doing is taking the blinders off so you can see the reality of your state and your condition before this holy God.

This wilderness is something that he leaves in our lives to a good extent as we are on this earthly pilgrimage, is it not? That's why Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn." That's why Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." What does he mean by that? You're aware there's a part of you that never gets over what you are without Jesus. Did you hear me? There's a part of you that never gets over what you would be like apart from Jesus. The barrenness. The lostness. The desperation. The hopelessness. A wilderness in your heart.

And, you see, God leaves that in there because that wilderness serves like the ballast in a ship. A ship needs a ballast to keep it steady through the rough waters and the waves and

that's what this does. As you live your life as a husband or a wife or a business owner or a worker or a student or whatever you may be, there is something inside of you that keeps you steady and that something is, "I know what I am apart from Christ and I need him. I need him." It causes you to never ultimately look to your own self for your joy and never look to this world for your fulfillment. It causes you to continually keep looking to Christ.

III and we're done. Not only does he woo the most unworthy, "I will allure her"; not only does he bring us to see our true need, "I will bring her into the wilderness"; but thirdly, he convinces us of favor. The third line of verse 14 of Hosea 2, "and speak kindly to her." Literally, speak to her heart. A husband says, "I've had all these years to pursue her. I've had all these years I've been thinking about her." Now think about this: she is in blackened, wicked adulteries, brazenly, brashly wiping her mouth and chasing another lover and in all that time, her husband has one continual consuming thought, "How can I win her back?" Not judgment. Not condemnation. "How can I win her back?"

So he finds her. He comes to her. She trembles in her wilderness condition. She's seeing, she knows what she deserves and the husband with all the care, the gentleness and the wisdom he has, speaks convincingly, gently, enticingly to her heart saying, "It's all over. You're completely forgiven. There's not one ounce of offense I take. Come home with me. I love you." And she's overwhelmed at that love and that grace. "I will speak kindly to her heart," and the truth of grace pierces through her heart like a dart. You see, the rebel soul requires these kind words because if we speak harsh things to this guilty-ridden soul, it would never find release.

I don't know how God does it exactly in everybody's life but I remember so distinctly as an 18 year old freshman in college driving back to Middle Tennessee State University listening to that Presbyterian preacher on the radio and it was as if God shined a beam of light through the top of that 72 Cutlass Oldsmobile and just waves of God's love just filled my heart. I knew I was wicked. I knew I was ungodly. I knew I was a bad person but God just said, "But I love you. But I love you." Now, in the following weeks there was deep awareness of my sin, deep feelings of guilt and unworthiness, but always the steady assurance, "I have forgiven you." That's that wilderness ballast.

You see, we are not released from the weight of sin and guilt because we changed, he comes to us having released us and he convinces our hearts in grace we're free. He convinces our hearts in grace, you're forgiven. He convinces our hearts in grace, you're mine. As a matter of fact, you've been mine from the foundation of the world and I've been looking for you and when I got to you, I've allured you back, speaking kindly to your heart.

It's not what you'd expect. It's not what the religionists want to teach and hear. It's a gloriously shocking unveiling of grace. What a God. What love. What forgiveness. What grace. You can't out-sin God. He slays you with compassion and forgiveness. No wonder the songwriter said, "Hallelujah, what a Savior."

Let's stand in prayer, alright?