

*I Will Betroth You to Me Forever: Hosea 2:14-23*  
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This morning we're going to study a glorious passage of Scripture in the Old Testament book of Hosea. Two weeks before Easter I started a series through this book, and so far we've made it to the middle of chapter 2. This morning we'll consider Hosea 2:14-23, and I pray this will be a great encouragement to your soul.

The Gospel comes through in various ways throughout the entire Bible. We see the Gospel message in different ways and from different vantage points from Genesis to Revelation. What we have in Hosea 2 is an extremely powerful picture of what God has done for us, and is doing for us, and will do for us, even though we are totally undeserving. I hope you'll listen attentively this morning, and I pray that the Spirit will do His work of convicting us and encouraging us.

Last week was Easter Sunday, and in the Good Friday service and on Sunday morning I preached from 1 Corinthians 1. By way of introduction this morning, I want to point out a theological link between that text and this text. We saw in 1 Corinthians 1 God's sovereignty in salvation. Paul contrasted two groups of people in that text: those who think the cross is foolishness, and those who know it to be the power and wisdom of God. And the decisive factor in whether a person is in the first category or the second is not how smart they are, or who their parents are, or how wealthy or powerful they are. The decisive factor is God's choice, God's calling. "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:23-24). The verses that follow continue to speak of God calling and choosing. This is God's sovereignty in salvation. He chooses whom He will, and He gets the credit for our salvation from first to last. It is His doing, from beginning to end.

Rather than be offended by this, we should praise God for His goodness and mercy and kindness. His sovereign grace is our only hope. We were dead in our trespasses and sins, and therefore we would never pursue God if He didn't first pursue us.

And this is the link with Hosea, because this is exactly what is being described for us in such a poignant way in Hosea 2. God is pursuing a rebellious people whom He has chosen to save. If you were here 2 weeks ago when we looked at the first part of Hosea 2, you remember how horribly Israel was sinning against God. The imagery is shocking and shameful. In chapter 1 Hosea was commanded by God to marry a woman who would be

unfaithful to him—a woman, who, in fact, would leave him in order to work as a prostitute. The reason God instructed Hosea in this way was so that Hosea’s marriage to Gomer would be a portrait of Yahweh’s marriage to Israel.

In chapter 2:2-13 we read of Yahweh’s redemptive discipline. God is pleading with His people, and warning them of the punishment to come. Her rebellion and her gross sin are appalling to Him. It breaks His heart. He wants her to repent and return home.

And now in our passage for this morning, Yahweh acts decisively to bring that about. She is so wrapped up in her sin, in bondage to her sin, that God, Himself, must go and get her. This is what I want each of us to see about our own sin, and our desperate need for a Savior. And this is what I want us to see about God’s tender compassion toward His chosen ones. Even though we have turned from Him, rebelled against Him, ignored Him, and pursued other lovers, He comes after us speaking tender words and plants in our hearts a genuine love for him. And He binds us to Himself eternally. This is God’s sovereignty in our salvation. It is His doing, from beginning to end.

There are four aspects of this passage that I want us to consider together. Reversal, removal (of idols), renewal, and repentance.

### **Reversal**

When we looked at Hosea 1 a few weeks ago, we saw the great reversal in 1:10. With the names of each of Hosea’s children, there was a message of warning and punishment for Israel. Verse 9 was the most devastating, “Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God.” But then verses 10-11 describe a reversal of those harsh words. There is hope beyond those harsh statements. They will be like the sand of the sea, and they will be called children of the living God.

What happens in chapter 2 is similar. There are harsh words in verses 2-13, and then a great reversal in verses 14-23. Let me point out to you several of these. There are several statements in the first half of the chapter that are specifically addressed (and reversed) in the second half of the chapter. We see in this the undeserved mercy of God upon sinners. The punishment outlined in the first half of the chapter is certainly what Israel deserved, and what we deserve. But God promises something different, something amazing. He promises to replace our punishment with paradise. He promises to reverse the curse and give us the reward of knowing Him and being with Him forever.

We'll be looking back and forth between these two sections of chapter 2, and also some in chapter 1. Let's observe these detailed reversals. First of all, notice the paradoxical use of the word "therefore" in verse 14. This doesn't actually follow logically from what has just been said. But in being illogical, it highlights how unexpected this is. In the logic of justice, this doesn't make sense. But in the logic of God's grace, this is what we have. Instead of punishment, God is going to allure His bride. He is going to bring her into the wilderness (picturing the exodus, when He brought her out of Egypt). And He's going to speak tenderly to her. This is amazing in light of the harsh statements in the previous verses. Harsh punishment turns to tender words.

Verse 15 says, "And there I will give her her vineyards." This is a reversal of the things that were said earlier in the chapter about God taking everything away from her—stripping her naked, uncovering her lewdness, putting an end to her mirth and feasts and festivals. The humiliation and affliction will turn to God bestowing gifts. In verse 3 God said that He would "make her like a parched land, and kill her with thirst." Now He says He will give her her vineyards.

In the next line of verse 15 He says that He will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There's an interesting reversal in that statement. The Valley of Achor is significant because it's where Achan was executed for disobeying God and greedily taking plunder for himself. Let me remind you of the story. It's in Joshua 7, as the Israelites are just beginning to enter the Promised Land. The Lord had given Jericho over to them in a miraculous way. They marched around the city, blew their trumpets, yelled, and God made the walls fall down. And God had given them very clear directions that they were to devote the entire city to destruction, except for Rahab and her family. But this man, Achan, took some things for himself. A few things caught his eye, and he coveted them—a beautiful cloak, and 200 shekels of silver, and a bar of gold weighing 50 shekels (Joshua 7:21). He took these things and hid them in his tent. Then the anger of the Lord burned against Israel because of this sin (Joshua 7:1). And with God's guidance, and under Joshua's supervision, Israel stoned Achan to death and burned him up, along with all his family and all his possessions. It's a very sad story, indeed. And it happened in the Valley of Achor—Achor meaning trouble.

Now God says that very place will become a door of hope—a place that brings to mind sin and punishment, greed, disobedience, and judgment. The reversal of God's grace is such that the Valley of Achor becomes a door of hope. All of us who are like Achan, who have disobeyed God and deserve His wrath, there is hope for us. In God's goodness to us, there is a door of

hope that can bring us out of the destruction we deserve into the delight of God's presence.

Moving on to verse 18 in Hosea 2, there's a reversal that has to do with the animal world. "And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground." This is a reversal of verse 12 where God said, "I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them." So instead of enmity between humans and animals, there will be peace.

And then the next line of verse 18 has to do with war. "And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety." Chapter 1:7 said, "I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen." Again, God is reversing the former punishments and turning them into wonderful promises. War will be no more, and God's people will enjoy absolute peace.

In verses 19-20 we have a very striking reversal. Back in verse 2 God had said, "she is not my wife, and I am not her husband." But now, in verses 19-20 He says, "And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness." That is a beautiful promise, which we'll come back to in a moment.

The last phrase of verse 20, "And you shall know the Lord," is a reversal of what was said at the end of verse 13, "and [she] forgot me, declares the Lord." The relationship turns from estrangement to intimacy.

The promises in verses 21-23 are a reversal of verse 9. In verse 9 God disciplines His people by taking back His grain, wine, wool and flax. The good things He had given to her, He takes back. But now He will give to her again. It's described in a poetic way. God will address the heavens, which will send rain to the earth, and the earth will produce the things they need.

And finally, there's a reversal in the names of the children. For Jezreel, the name is not changed, but a new meaning is drawn from it. In 1:4 Jezreel was connected with the bloodshed of the Valley of Jezreel, and so the name was a word of judgment. But here in 2:22 the connection is with the actual meaning of the name Jezreel, which means, "God sows." The message now is that God will plant His people in the land. Rather than casting them out, He will establish them.

The remaining two names are reversed exactly. No Mercy becomes the one who receives mercy, and Not My People becomes "You are my people." And the devastating word in 1:9 that "you are not my people, and I am not your God," is reversed here in

2:23 where it says, “and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”

Now, what’s the point of all this? Maybe you’ve gotten lost in the details. I want to give you the big picture and tell you why this is so amazing. What we’re seeing here in these reversals is the message of the Gospel. God is saying to Israel, and to us, “This is who you are and what you’ve done and what you deserve. But this is what I’m going to do for you instead.” It sounds illogical when the two are set next to each other in such stark contrast. We scratch our heads and wonder how this text jumps from one to the other. But this is nothing other than the shocking message of the Gospel.

You are a spiritual adulterer. You have abandoned God and played the whore. You have gone after other lovers. You have worshipped idols. Because of this, you deserve for God to divorce you, disown you, destroy you. But instead, God says, “I will betroth you to me forever.”

Listen to a familiar New Testament passage that communicates the same message. This is from Ephesians 2. "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh [does this sound familiar? Doesn't this sound like the spiritual adultery we've been seeing in the book of Hosea?], carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath [we deserved to be punished by God], like the rest of mankind. But God [here's the great reversal], being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus [these are the undeserved blessings He showers upon us], so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:1-9)

This is the Gospel, friends. This is the great salvation God grants to His people, to those who believe. You're not going to earn this salvation by works, but you receive it as a gift by faith. This is the great reversal of the Gospel. Those who are dead in sin and deserving of wrath, get God's grace and steadfast love instead.

### **Removal (of idols)**

The second thing I want us to observe about this text is God's removal of idols. And I just want to say something brief about this and reiterate a point I made two weeks ago. Notice in Hosea 2:16 that there will be a change in the way Israel addresses God. "And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call my 'My Baal.'" That word Baal can simply mean master or lord. And so the Israelites may have felt justified in using the term for Yahweh. But Baal was also the name of the Canaanite deity. So there was syncretism going on here. Israel was mixing their worship of Yahweh with worship of idols. God is saying, that will be no more. He goes on in verse 17, "For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more." God will remove their idols.

The point I made two weeks ago is that we shouldn't grieve when God removes an idol from our lives. We shouldn't mourn over something that is lost, if, in fact, God is taking away something that was keeping us from Him. Rather than dreading this, we should actually ask God to do this in our lives. "God, do whatever it takes to destroy the idols in my life so that I will put my hope fully in You."

### **Renewal**

Let's move on, then, to renewal. The language of this section is renewal language. The marriage is being renewed. The relationship is being restored. And there are images in this passage that look back to the Garden of Eden, and also that look forward to what Jesus Christ will establish at His second coming—the consummation of all things. This is big picture renewal that God is describing here. The ultimate fulfillment of these things will happen when our Messiah returns and makes everything right.

As we saw in verse 18, this renewal involves peace with the animal world. And in verse 22 the earth will provide plentifully. These are pictures of what life was like in Eden, before the Fall, before the curse. You remember that part of the curse was that God cursed the ground and said to the man, "in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life." Well, God is promising to His people in Hosea 2 that He will restore the peace and harmony and purity of Eden. There will be no fear of animals. There will be no fear of draught or famine.

This is what we have to look forward to when our Messiah returns. He will make everything right. We will no longer experience the effects of the curse. It will be like the Garden of Eden, but even better. There won't even be the possibility of sin. We will enjoy God's presence forever and ever.

This is the amazing promise of verses 19-20. "And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord." There are a few things I want us to notice about this.

### **Heart Change**

First, God is betrothing His people to Himself. He is pledging to her His steadfast love. But it's even more than that. He is going to change her in such a way that she, too, is committed to Him with steadfast love. And that must involve a heart change on her part, which God will have to perform. This relates to the new covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34. "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

This is what the renewed marriage will entail. In this renewed marriage, in this new covenant, God's people will love Him from their heart, and they will truly know Him.

### **You Shall Know the Lord**

And that's the second thing I want to say about this—that this renewal involves a true and abiding knowledge of God. That's what it says at the end of verse 20 in our passage. "And you shall know the Lord." Israel had forgotten their God. They had left Him to serve idols. But in this renewed relationship God will be with His people forever. They will know Him intimately, communing with Him and enjoying Him for all eternity. This is exactly what John describes for us in his vision of heaven in Revelation 21. "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'" These things are the ultimate fulfillment of what Hosea and Jeremiah were writing about. This is what God promises to His people. He comes and regenerates us, giving us

new hearts to love Him. And He binds us to Himself permanently and promises to be with us forever.

### **God's Righteousness**

The third thing to notice in Hosea 2:19-20 is that God provides what is necessary for this renewal to happen. The analogy, of course, is betrothal and marriage. And the custom was for the groom to pay a bride-price in order to gain the right to marry the woman. Well, on this analogy, God is the one paying the bride-price to secure this betrothal. And what is the bride-price? It's God's righteousness and justice, God's steadfast love and mercy, God's faithfulness.

It's not the righteousness we bring to the table, because we have none. It's not our justice or steadfast love or mercy or faithfulness. God is the One who provides all of this for His people. It was this understanding that revolutionized Martin Luther's life. The statement in Romans 1 about the righteousness of God made Luther fearful and even angry toward God, because he thought the righteousness of God just meant what God demands of us. But then he came to understand that when it says "in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith," it's referring to a righteousness that God provides for His people as a gift to be received by faith. In this way God provides what He demands. Yes, we must possess righteousness. But we don't have it. So God sends His own Son, Jesus Christ, to live a righteous life and then die a sacrificial death in our place, and then Christ's righteousness is credited to those who believe.

As I said at the beginning of this sermon, God accomplishes our salvation from beginning to end. He comes after us, even as we are pursuing sin. He changes our hearts so that we love Him. He betroths us to Himself, and He provides what is necessary to make us His own. And He assures that we will be united to Him forever.

### **All the Nations**

The last thing I want to say about the renewal described in this text is that it will include not only the nation of Israel, but all the nations. The amazing promises spoken here to Israel will spill over and extend to the ends of the earth. We see this when we look at how this passage is quoted in the New Testament.

In Romans 9 Paul is teaching about God's sovereign election of individuals, and in verse 24 of that chapter he refers to "us whom [God] has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles," and then he backs up that statement by quoting Hosea. "As indeed he says in Hosea, 'Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will



call ‘beloved.’ ” “And in the very place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ there they will be called ‘sons of the living God.’ ”” Paul understands, from his vantage point in salvation history, that those words which were originally addressed to Israel have a wider application. In God’s plan of redemption, He has chosen a people for Himself, not just from one ethnic group, but from all ethnicities. The bride of Christ will be made up of individuals from every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Revelation 5:9).

Peter, also, cites Hosea and sees this as fulfilled in the church. He is addressing several churches, and he writes in 1 Peter 2:9-10, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

This is who we are, brothers and sisters, and this is what we’re a part of. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, then you are part of this multi-ethnic, global people of God, chosen by Him to proclaim His excellencies. And this is the great reversal and renewal that has happened to you, that you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. And as such, we have a great future to look forward to. The bridegroom will return, and we will celebrate with Him forever at the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9).

### **Repentance**

The point I want to make in closing is an exhortation to repent. We’ve seen reversal, removal (of idols), renewal, and now I’ll end by talking about repentance. Duane Garrett offers a really helpful insight about this passage and its intended effect, both in the original context and now. For the Israel of Hosea’s day, they should have heard the warnings of Hosea 2:2-13 and also the promises of Hosea 2:14-23, and it should have brought repentance. They should have feared God’s wrath and desired God’s grace, and it should have profoundly changed them.

And that’s the effect it should have on us. Garrett writes, “Christians would do well to consider what demands the hopes of the future make on the present. If the unity of all believers and the removal of all evil will characterize the consummated kingdom of God (Rev 7:9; 22:15), it is surely the case that we should seek to attain those ideals, however imperfectly, in the church today.”<sup>1</sup> I think that’s a great insight into how this vision of the future should

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<sup>1</sup> *Hosea, Joel*, page 92.

impact us today. Don't you desire to know God and be in His presence? Don't you desire to be free from the idols that enslave you? Don't you desire peace and rest? We'll experience those things perfectly in heaven, but that doesn't mean we just sit around apathetically waiting for that. If these glorious realities have any appeal to us whatsoever, then we'll be pursuing them now! We'll be fighting to destroy idols. We'll be digging into God's Word to know Him better. We'll be communing with Him in prayer, pleading for His help and His grace and forgiveness and provision.

So in light of the great things that God has promised for His people, let us be a people who are earnestly seeking Him. May these promises stir up our passion for Him. May this passage intensify our desire for God. And may all of chapter 2, the warnings and the promises, drive us to true repentance.

Some of you are just playing games. You're just going through the motions. You know the right church answers to give, but in your heart you are clinging to idols. I hope you see the carrot and the stick in this chapter. God warns us with the stick of discipline. There will be consequences for sin. And He also holds out the carrot of reward. He holds out these amazing promises for His people. We need to be motivated in both ways. May God have mercy on us and apply this text to our souls in a way that changes us forever.