

# The Scandal of the Gospel

## Hosea 3

The story we have in front of us today is one of most shameful, embarrassing, and beautiful stories in the Bible.

It is a shameful story, a story we aren't sure our children should hear, about a woman who slept with strange men and gave birth to illegitimate children.

It is an embarrassing story as God shows us the nature of our own sin.

It is a devastating and beautiful story – devastating to our pride as we are brought face to face with a love we don't deserve and that will not let us go.

### I. A Scandalous Marriage

In order to understand the full impact of this story we need to understand Hosea's historical context. He was God's prophet to Israel in a time of great material prosperity and spiritual idolatry. They were worshipping the pagan gods of the pagan nations surrounding them. They had thus violated the most basic principle of their covenant with God: "I am the Lord your God – you shall have no other gods before me."

Consequently, God called Hosea to give Israel a vivid picture, a startling display of what they were in their sin. And so in chapter 1 God gives Hosea this command:

***Hosea 1:2-3** When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the LORD." So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.*

It's a shocking, scandalous command.

Hosea is defined by godliness: as a prophet he is a man set apart to God, a man to whom God speaks, and with whom God is closely identified. Hosea was acknowledged by all as a righteous, virtuous, upright, and holy man.

Gomer is absolutely at the opposite end of the moral and spiritual spectrum. She is a prostitute in Israel, a woman who sold her beauty and her body to get the material things she wanted. While Hosea was identified with the things of heaven, the steps of Gomer lead straight to hell. And God commanded Hosea to marry her. It's morally stunning.

This marriage is so inappropriate that John Calvin in his commentary assures us that it didn't really happen! Here's what Calvin says:

"There is no doubt that this is a vision, for they are too gross in their notions (in other words, they have a perverse mind) who think that the Prophet married a woman who had been a harlot. It was then only a vision." (Calvin 123)

While Calvin is certainly wrong in his remarks, he's certainly right in his reaction. In the name of all that's good and holy, Hosea should not be in a marriage covenant with this sort of woman! What fellowship does light have with darkness? This marriage is an offense, contrary to everything that is good and moral.

So why does God have him do it? Why does God command Hosea to enter into a marriage covenant with a woman of whoredom? God tells us, doesn't he?

*"For the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord."*

God was showing Israel the reality of their marriage to him. Gomer was Israel. And God was married to her.

**Hosea 3:1** *And 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, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."*

God was married to a harlot, in covenant union with a whore. That's the point of the story. He was a faithful God and husband to her. But she was faithless, committing spiritual adultery with any pagan god she thought could give her the material things she wanted. Israel was a whore. And she was God's wife.

But the scandal gets worse.

## II. A Scandalous Redemption

The marriage to Gomer was troubled. It started fine; they had a child, a son – always a good sign, a sign of God's blessing. But the second and third children were a great heartache. They were almost certainly not fathered by Hosea. God had commanded Hosea, "take a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom" and that seems to be exactly what happened.

Notice, we are told in 1:3 that Gomer "conceived and bore him a son." Jezreel was clearly his son. The second two conceptions are not ascribed to Hosea at all. She simply conceived. And the names suggest that these are truly children of whoredom.

The daughter is given the very troubling name "Lo-Ruhama." No pity. No mercy.

The name of the 3<sup>rd</sup> child is "Not my people." Can you imagine that? When Hosea brings this child to be circumcised and the priest asks, "What is his name?", Hosea would reply, "Not mine." What a shameful, humiliating scene for this prophet of God.

And now, in 3:1 Hosea is told, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress."

### 1. The Humiliation He Endured

"Go again." Gomer is clearly, once again, not at home. She's back in the lifestyle he found her in. That's what "go again" means. Go again, back to the wrong side of town. Back to the places where the prostitutes do their business.

If it had been humiliating the first time, when Hosea went there as a single man, think of what it would like this time, a married man looking for his own wife.

But God commanded and so Hosea goes – to the part of town where godly men should never go. And he has to ask the most humiliating questions, questions a godly husband should never have to ask of strange men: "Have you seen my wife? Have you seen Gomer? I'm looking for my wife."

When he finally finds her, she is a slave. She's in bondage to someone, maybe her pimp. Many people think that Hosea found her on the auction block. It was the most wretched and humiliating of scenes. Slaves were sold naked so prospective buyers could see what they were getting. This is what Gomer's harlotry had led to, just as God had prophesied concerning Israel.

*2:10 I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers.*

This is where unrepented idolatry leads – to nakedness, exposure, bondage, and shame. And this is where Hosea finds his wife. Exposed. Guilty. Sold into slavery.

Have you ever felt like that? Revealed to be great sinner, covered with shame and guilt? Expecting nothing and deserving nothing but condemnation? Well, that's where the miracles happen. That's where redemption takes place.

Hosea buys Gomer for himself.

**3:2** *So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley.*

## 2. The Price He Paid

The price of a slave was fixed by the Mosaic law. In Leviticus 27:4 we are told that the price for a female slave was to be fixed at **30** shekels. Hosea paid 15 shekels, and then a homer and lethech of barley. A lethech is one half of a homer. Now the price of barley was also fixed by Mosaic law.

**Lev. 27:16** *A homer of barley seed shall be valued at fifty shekels of silver.*

So, do the math. One homer of barley equals 50 shekels; plus another half homer, 25 shekels, equaling 75 shekels in grain. Add the 15 shekels in coin for a total of **90** shekels. He paid **three times** the price required for the purchase of a slave.

Imagine what that would communicate to Gomer! Her life was forfeited because of her harlotry. And the single person against whom she had most grievously sinned, her own husband, was willing to come down to the degradation and shame of that auction, come down and publicly claim her as his wife, suffer the humiliation of having to buy what was already rightfully his, and then pay more than was required in order to take her back home.

For those who are offended, what did you think grace looked like? Sometimes we assume that grace looks neat and tidy. But there is a scandal to grace. Holiness embraces lewdness and perversion. Eternal faithfulness embraces unfaithfulness.

## 3. The Promise He Made

**3:3** *And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."*

Can you believe that? He renews his marriage covenant with her. He is taking her back as his wife, calling her to be faithful to him and pledging himself to be faithful to her. "So will I also be to you." He brings her back to the marriage, back to full and complete union and communion with him, pledging his love and faithfulness to her.

This is the glory of God's ways.

**Hosea 2:16-20** *And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me "My Husband," and no longer will you call me "My Baal." For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. 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. And I will abolish the bow, the*

*sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. 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.*

### III. A Scandalous Savior

**3:4-5** *For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.*

Israel was going to experience a time of suffering. Days without a king or prince. Israel's children would go into captivity because of her sin. But not forever! "Afterward" they would return to the Lord their God and David their King.

Praise God for this "afterward!" Guilt and sin and shame are NOT the final word. They are not the last truth. There is always, in God's economy of grace, an "afterward" for those who seek him.

Hosea's renewed marriage was just a sign of things to come. There would be another Hosea. Hosea means "salvation." It comes from the exact same Hebrew word from which we get the name of Jesus. Do you think it is an accident that God calls the prophet Hosea to marry Gomer? This is precisely what Jesus has done for you. Jesus loved us when we were prostitutes, lost in our sin. He claimed us, brought us into covenant with him – not when we were cleaned up and made morally pure, but when we were still in the grip of our love affair with idols. He came to the place where sin and judgment reign. The place where we were enslaved, on the auction block and headed for our doom.

Oh the humiliation he was willing to endure! The shame of coming to his own – and his own rejected him, despised him, received him not. The shame of coming to the wrong side of the universe, the wrong side of the law, the wrong side of divine justice – in order to find us where we were and rescue us. Willing to pay far more than we were ever possibly worth. We have been purchased with his life blood.

**Eph. 1:7-8** *In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us...*

Jesus is Hosea. And he has come for Gomer! He has come for you. Yes, you. The morally compromised person, the spiritual adulteress. When Jesus was on earth, the moral people, the scribes and Pharisees, castigated him: "Why do you eat with sinners? Why do you

spend time with prostitutes and tax collectors?" And he responded from the book of Hosea! "I desire mercy, not sacrifice. I have come for the sinners, not for the righteous. I'm here for Gomer!

Friend, Jesus Christ the Son of God entered the battle with sin and death and emerged victorious from the fight. He stands now with visible wounds and pierced side, and he cries into this world, calling for his wife: "Gomer! Gomer! I'm looking for Gomer."

And when you come to him, the Lover of your soul, this is what he will say to you: "You are mine. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you."

We had wandered, we all had wandered,  
far from the fold of the shepherd of the sheep.  
But he sought us where we were, on the mountains bleak and bare,  
and brought us home, and brought us home, and brought us safely home to God.

Gomer's story is not her sin. Her story is grace. Your story is not your sin. Your story is his grace. And that grace? It flows to wherever you are, and it covers anything you have done. Christ pursues us – wherever we have run. He comes to us, in our self-made mess, and brings us back to Him. He redeems, restores, and renews. His love for us is pure grace – scandalous grace. (Stacy Edwards, <http://shereadstruth.com/2013/08/07/wob3day3/>)