

The Depth of God's Love

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Hosea 1:1-2:1. [Page 751](#)

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are beginning our series through the book of Hosea.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] It's always interesting to retrace a train of thought. How did our conversation that started with discussing the best Asian food in Spokane end up with a conversation about the ethics of military air shows? When you open the first few pages of the Bible, it almost seems like there is a major subject change. A huge transition in God's train of thought. He starts by telling us about how He created the whole universe, and then, next thing you know. We have the events of a wedding described to us. Did God get distracted? Where did that come from?

As we follow the Bible's teaching to the New Testament, what we find is that this wedding ceremony between Adam and Eve is actually about something greater. Human marriage is a picture of Christ's love for His Church. God's love for His people. What we find is that at the core of the story of history. The story of God's interaction with humanity. Is a love story. Creation seems to exist for the sake of a setting for the outworking of God's deep love toward people made in His image. When we encounter God we find the source of love with a bottomless depth. Romance is wrapped up with the very fibers of the world we live in. Sure, there is more to the Bible and creation than love, but there is certainly not less.

We find ourselves in a love crisis in our culture. Marriage has never been more unpopular. More defamed. More misunderstood. We've been trained that love is a trick our evolved minds play on us to make us want to propagate our young. We've been trained that love is a means for self-fulfillment- we look for someone who will help us accomplish our goals. We've been trained that love can be defined and redefined by anyone. We merely need to say, "love is love." And we find that we've never been more depressed. Still, we find that we can't overcome the drive and rush that comes from loving and being loved. Our movies are often love stories. The radio is full of silly love songs. We can either abandon or

embrace the idea of love. God, who is love, wants us to embrace the depth of love. And not just any old love. The love from Him. That is wrapped up in the very existence of the universe. So, as we look at Hosea 1:1-2:1, let's help one another

[Proposition] Embrace the depth of God's love.

In Hosea, who prophesied from approximately 755-722BC, we have beautiful language and imagery. Calling us to embrace the depth of God's love. But Hosea does this through scandal. Grittiness. Mess. As we do, let's notice three things that we must embrace to embrace the depth of God's love. We must embrace that there's a whore in your house. We must embrace the children of consequences. Lastly, wonderfully, we must embrace the Loyal Lover Himself.

Let's start with the very difficult reality first.

[Reality #1] There's a whore in your house.

That word whore seems harsh. But Hebrew scholars consistently note that it's the most accurate. So often cruel names like this are thrown around with no truth. But that's not the case here. "Whore" is the right title because

[Subpoint 1] A whore by God's Word.

Look at v. 1 with me

The word of the LORD that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

Hosea is speaking to the northern nation of Israel, and his writings are being recorded for the southern nation of Judah. But these are not just his thoughts. The word of the LORD came to Him. Therefore, any language and ideas we find here, including the harsh reality of being called "whores," comes from the always true and accurate mind of God. Our understanding of ourselves, and our sins must always be informed, not by our culture or background. Not by our friends or ideas. But by God's Word. And God's Word, let it be known, uses this language in reference to deviations away from a marriage between one man and one woman.

God is calling people whores. How does a person become a whore in God's sight?

[Subpoint 2] A whore by forsaking the LORD.

Let's read v. 2

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."

[Apologetic] Modern feminists have objected to the book of Hosea. They think it is misogynistic. Portraying men as controllers and inherently good while women as loose and immoral. But we must recognize a couple things, in this particular situation, Gomer actually is guilty of this. The text is not saying that all women are like this. Secondly, she represents the whole land. In this patriarchal society, men should bear the brunt of the blame. And God is saying that they are the whores! And quite honestly, I think that such behavior primarily exists today, because men have learned to take advantage and manipulate women. Even building structures of prostitution and pornography that assist them in their selfish, evil endeavors. Women are often victims. Admit it. Still, no matter how broken we are, sin is never the right response. Additionally, Hosea is going to show a picture that a women, as God's image-bearers, are valuable and worthy of notice and can be recipients of God's deep love regardless of what a culture labels them. We need to hear what Hosea has to tell us.

[Exposition] Like our culture, in Hosea's time, there is a love crisis going on. The whole land of Israel- implying everything in people's day-to-day life, is bent on forsaking the LORD and loving other things. The Hebrew idea is that the people are actively fornicating themselves away from YHWH. The LORD. That through their abandonment of Him, they continue to thrust themselves forward, while God is behind their back. If you spend months with your spouse, but minutes with your mistress you've still forsaken her. If you spend some time with the LORD but other time elsewhere for your meaning and identity. You've forsaken the LORD. So this is what is happening in Hosea's time. People are whoring away from God. A bit of time with the LORD, some time with other gods or trusting in other things.

But I've said that there's a whore in your house. How can I say that? There's a few reasons. The first is that the Old Testament community functions as a sort of prophetic and priestly representative for all of humanity. They are us. What they are like is what we are like. Like them, we forsake the LORD by not giving Him our undivided loyalty and attention. During the days of Jeroboam II, of the dynasty of

Jehu, there was immense material prosperity. People had it good. Bellies were full. Smiles were on people's faces. They were comfortable. So they didn't see their need to stay loyal to the LORD. They could have a little bit of YHWH worship and a little bit of Baal worship- which often involve sexual acts. They could have a little bit of hope in YHWH, but they could also trust in military might, political influence, and foreign allies.

[Application] Now this sounds like us. We look in the mirror and some of our hope is in Jesus, sure. But it's also a bit in our popularity with the people around us. So we indulge in the dirty jokes in the office or online. That way we fit in. We trust in Jesus, sure. But we won't really be happy unless we have the right sort of political leader and enough military might. We say we love Jesus, sure. But we don't panic too much with trouble at church but we do panic when we hear that we might lose our jobs. We say we worship Jesus, sure. But our attention in getting to know Him by listening to Him speak in preaching or in Bible study is short. And we'd rather text our friends than talk to the living God. Let's get that over with and get back to the things we really love. I dare to say it. We, like the people of Israel, are the whores.

We forsake someone. We are disloyal, because we believe what they have and what they give isn't enough to make us happy. A recent article I read said that millennials say that they need to make \$525,000 a year to be happy. And the average respondent says they need to have \$1.2 million in the bank to be happy. That's how we find happiness. By creating a god of money to protect us. This means that there is a lot of unhappy people out there. They aren't experiencing the depth of God's love. They are looking for it elsewhere. Through what money can bring them.

Hosea could look out his window in the 8th Century BC and what he saw were whores. Unlovable people everywhere. Nothing that could possibly make them desirable to a holy and pure God. Everywhere. And now God is commanding him to bring a literal one into his own house. What a command. Clearly, God does not view the purpose of Hosea's marriage to be one of achieving higher status or fulfillment. But it's not just the wife. Not just love and marriage. But here comes Hosea with a baby carriage.

We need to embrace the depth of God's love. First, we need to embrace that there's a whore in our house. But God's love is deeper. Now second.

[Reality #2] Embrace the children of consequences.

[Illustration] Parental actions lead to consequences with children. Drug abuse and excessive chemical intake in the womb impacts our children's development. And then their disabilities have consequences on us. Children who are abandoned by one parent will often have trust issues and take that out on others. Their wounds have consequences.

We learn the names of three children in Hosea and Gomer's household. Perhaps there were more. Some scholars wonder if Gomer had children with her when she married Hosea the prophet. But we do know that she is going to have three children. Let's meet them and notice the consequences...

[Child #1] A boy, Jezreel

Let's read vv. 3-5

So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. And the LORD said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

Jezreel means, "God sows." As in God plants seeds- and that will be important in coming chapters. It sounds very close to Israel. But Jezreel, a place in the north was characterized by bloodshed. Naboth was brutally murdered by Ahab there. When Jehu ended the Omride dynasty of Ahab's descendants he did so under the command of God, but he also seems to have gone overboard and enjoyed becoming a bloodbath. So this would be like naming your son, "Columbine," or "Sandy Hook," or some other mass murder sight. But this child comes with the consequence: God is promising that the end of the Jehu dynasty, and Israel as a whole, is coming. His bow will be broken. No military defense left. And it will happen with geographic connection to the Valley of Jezreel. This is referring to Assyria's coming conquest in the late 730s or 720s.

That's the consequence of being whores. The first child is a boy, Jezreel. Bloodshed. Bloodbath. Now,

[Child #2] A girl, No Mercy

Let's read vv. 6-7

She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Call her name No Mercy, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all. But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the LORD their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

[Illustration] Picture this, a little girl playing in dirt streets with her friends. Little homemade dolls. Playing school and house. It's getting close to dinner. The sweet sound of a mother's voice carried on the soft wind of Israel: "Grace, Graaaace, time to eat darling." Soon after, "Naomi, that is to say, 'pleasant one,' Dad's home from the fields. Come home and give him a hug." Then, "Joy, we have some treats for you!" Then the deep voice of Hosea, "No Mercy. Time to come home!"

What a name, always reminding the people of Israel that the mercy they've received from God for centuries is coming to an end soon. The southern kingdom of Judah may get a bit of mercy, but the punishment for being spiritual prostitutes means that there's no more mercy left. That's the consequence.

Embrace the consequences personified by three children. Jezreel aka God sows and bloodshed. No Mercy, this little girl. And now the third

[Child #3] A boy, Not My People

Let's listen to vv. 8-9

When she had weaned No Mercy, she conceived and bore a son. And the LORD said, "Call his name Not My People, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

There is debate whether these second two children are Hosea's children. Or whether they are illegitimate. I sort of lean that they are illegitimate- fathered by Gomer's lovers who aren't Hosea, but it's not required. But again we hear Hosea

calling again to this little boy, “Not My People. Not my Son. No Son of Mine. Come on. We need to go to Grandma’s!”

There is something almost unimaginable happening here. If we go back to the earliest chapters and books of the Bible. We encounter God making a covenant with Abraham and this covenant is summarized with the idea that YHWH will be their God and the descendants of Abraham will be His people. This covenant language comes up again and again. And when God reveals Himself to Moses, stating that He is the God of Abraham, He describes Himself as merciful and gracious and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness to thousands.

So what we have here in Hosea is the affirmation that Israel has been breaking the covenant so egregiously. So defiantly. So horribly. That the promises of the covenant do not belong to them anymore. God will not be merciful. They will not be His people. He will not be their God. This is like anti-Covenant language. These little children and the words from Hosea’s mouths would be seen as incredibly painful. They would be anti-patriotic. The one thing Israel could have counted on- God Himself- has now left them. They are now just like every other nation out there. They are Gentiles.

[Application] This must inform us about the experiential hurt and hate of sin. Israel’s sin and our sin. This is not theoretical. It is deeply personal. Sin is looking God in the eyes with a smile while we stab Him in the guts. It is promising undying loyalty to One and then leaving the room to let a lover through the back window and sneak into the guest room with them. It should make us feel like we’re going to throw up. If we see it rightly, we’ll hate it. We will understand that we have no claims on God’s favor or love at all. That what we deserve is wrath and abandonment in Hell where we experience suffering forever. That no amount of effort could make up for the level of betrayal we’ve committed. Bloodbath. No Mercy. Not My People. That’s the best we should ever expect from God.

But the main point of this sermon and the book of Hosea is to Embrace the depth of God’s love. We have to embrace that there’s a whore in each of our houses. And it’s us. But God’s love is deeper. And we have to embrace that sin has children with consequences. But God’s love is deeper. But let’s embrace the final thing.

[Reality #3] Embrace the Loyal Lover

Read vv. 10-2:1

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel. Say to your brothers, "You are my people," and to your sisters, "You have received mercy."

We find here that God is far, far, far better than we could ever imagine. He loves His people with a deep and personal love. Just when people who read Hosea find themselves to be in the depths of despair with no hope. The divine lover moves in. He draws close. Now they will not only be God's people, they will be God's children. And the mercy that they forfeited, and we have forfeited through our sin is conquered by love.

God will take two nations- Israel and Judah that was at civil war at the worst of times and often ignoring one another in better times. There will be a reunion. There will be prosperity. More people than can be counted. This goes right back to the promise to Abraham. No amount of disloyalty can change God's character. Nobody has loved you like this. Nobody else can possibly love like this. Gomer's lovers, as we'll see, will not love her like this. The idols that Israel has been worshipping and the foreign nations they're tempted to trust will never love them like this. And we see that this is coming through a person who will lead them. How will this work?

[Gospel] Gomer should be ashamed of herself. Israel should be ashamed of itself. With our sin, we should be ashamed of ourselves. Oh, how often we look elsewhere for love. What's going to happen to our shame. As we follow the Bible's story, we learn that that shame didn't just go away. It couldn't just go away. Someone had to carry it away. The leader that is hinted at here has come. Jesus has come. And He loved God with a pure and loyal heart. And what it got Him was rejection and shame. Mocking. Suffering. Being abandoned by God. On the cross, Jesus cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" We could restate that as, "God, have you renamed me 'no mercy?' Why do I get treated like I am not your Son? Have you renamed me 'not my people?' Why am I

living the reality that Israel and the whole world deserves?" But in His pain, Jesus knew the answer to those why questions. Do you know?

These verses are quoted in the New Testament. "Where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God." That's quoted in Romans 9 as means of reveal the deep beauty and wisdom and glory of God. And what it's showing is that God is so loving that He determines to set His love on people who weren't His people through His free choice. People who had done nothing of any spiritual good. Who would persist in their spiritual adultery. Unless He intervenes. He takes Gentiles. And makes them children of the living God. And the way this works itself out in our lives is this:

We see the loyal lover with spiritual sight. We recognize we deserve Hell and we have no claim on His love. But then we look at Jesus and we see that He was treated the way Gomer, and Israel, and we deserve to be treated. Paying the penalty for our sin and shame. And if the payment has been made, then God will show us mercy. He will love us as Hosea loves Gomer. And God welcomes us as His children. And we trust Jesus and we affirm that our response must be to never look to other Savior.

[Application] Some of us need to hear this. When we embrace the Loyal Lover, we are not just accepting an idea. We are embracing a person. A living, feeling, lovely person. Who loves our souls with passion and loyalty and affection. So we ask ourselves what have we done to earn this love? Hosea and the cross of Jesus Christ give us the answer. Nothing! No, worse than nothing! We've spiritually fornicated away from Him by forsaking Him.

But then the Holy Spirit helps us see Him. And He wins our hearts. Could someone love us so deeply after such betrayal? Yes. Could someone want us back after acting like we don't want or need Him? Yes. And He calls us to listen to His loving words to us. And to live in relationship with Him. You don't have to make yourself lovable. You need to receive His love and trust His promise to love you. And His love will transform you into something lovely and loveable.

[Conclusion] Love and romance are at the root of reality. Let me leave you with this. And this will come up again and again. All other gods, which are no gods at all, are like bad boyfriends. They will say they love you, but not really. But they will make you go looking for them. You will have to find them. In seed form in

Hosea and in the revealed mystery of the gospel we see love that is far greater. A much deeper love that we are called to embrace. A much more wonderful love and lover. The Bible tells the story of the God who loves us so much that He comes to us.