



The Greatest Love Story Ever Told

Message by Pastor Andrew Kulasingham 12th April 2020

It begins as a typical story just like all the other books of the prophets in the Old Testament.

It tells you the name of the prophet, and the years of ministry under the various Kings who ruled in Israel and Judah.

Hosea 1:1 (NKJV) **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.**

What's significantly different, maybe even shocking, about this book is that Hosea is instructed by the Lord to marry a woman who then becomes a prostitute. She will leave him and his children. Then God instructs Hosea again to take her back to be his wife after she has been with multiple lovers and has hit rock bottom.

It is shocking and strange because it is not the norm. It is uncommon for wives and mothers to abandon their husbands and children in that way. The more common story we hear time and time again are of men who abandon young pregnant women, or leave their wives and children for other women.

It is also rare to see a man who portrays such grace and love to take back such a woman as we will see in this story.

You might also see it as strange that I have chosen such a theme to speak on for an Easter Sunday message. These are strange times indeed.

Nonetheless this is the story.

Hosea 1:2-3 (NKJV) **When the Lord began to speak by Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea: "Go, take yourself a wife of harlotry and children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the LORD." ³ So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.**

The text suggests Hosea was already hearing from God. He was a young man the first time he heard from God – and it came to pass that God tells him to get married – but God is specific – marry a “wife of harlotry”. The original Hebrew suggests “a promiscuous” woman.

You might be surprised that God has required such a thing of Hosea. You might even be tempted to counsel Hosea that he has heard incorrectly. You would be forgiven for giving such an advice. But you will be wrong nonetheless. God did speak to Hosea and God did tell him to choose a woman with a reputation for promiscuity.

Hosea marries Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. We are not told why she was chosen. Attractive? Maybe she was. After all we can assume she had many who desired her. Maybe he felt sorry for her. Maybe he thought he could bring hope back to her life and change the trajectory of her destiny. We are not told the reasons.

I can only imagine the joy in the heart of Diblaim. When a daughter develops such a reputation, how was he to find a respectable man who will be willing to marry her? But in walks a shimmering light – a young man, with already a promising career as a prophet. Even at this young age, he is known to speak as the mouth piece of God Almighty. He was to marry Gomer – such joy – hope restored.

Let me be very clear. All we have been told about this marriage are in two verses. The rest is mere conjecture. The fact is, this is not a story of Hosea and Gomer. Their relationship only takes up ten verses of the fourteen chapters of this book. No, this story is not at all about Hosea and Gomer. This is a love story. Not like any other – the main characters are God and His people.

But Hosea's experience resonates with Yahweh – Hosea understands pain very well. Deception, betrayal, repeated breaking of the covenant relationship. He understands all this. It resonates with him. He is able to articulate it so well on behalf of God. Using his amazing penmanship, Hosea skilfully writes down the words of Yahweh, masterfully using poetry and helpful metaphors to carry out the task.

It is the naming of the children that unveils the true nature of this story.

1. Hosea's first child – a son.

Hosea 1:4-5 (NLT) And the Lord said, **“Name the child Jezreel, for I am about to punish King Jehu's dynasty to avenge the murders he committed at Jezreel. In fact, I will bring an end to Israel's independence. I will break its military power in the Jezreel Valley.”**

Jezreel means “sow in strength”. This is the name of the city where Jehu had brought an end to the terrible reign of Ahab and Jezebel. But Jehu didn't do it for God. He looked like he was responding to the word of the Lord. He rode on God's favour but all the time wanting to establish his own agenda. He ends up establishing places of worship to the golden calf in Bethel and Dan.

The mixture in Jehu's heart undid all the purging God did through him. What difference would it be to worship Baal or the golden calf? His mixture made the bloodshed in Jezreel unrighteous and wicked. He had abused the Lord's favour and turned a spiritual purging into a massacre.

God had enough of the two-faced hypocrisy of the leadership – presenting themselves as doing Godly deeds when all the time having agendas of their own. God had enough of the hypocrisy of the priests. God had enough of the mixture in His people. No more favour for God's people, no more fighting on their side just to see them abuse God's favour to do wickedness. I will no longer sow in strength - **“I will break the bow of Israel”** (NKJV).

2. Second child – a daughter

Hosea 1:6 (NLT) **Soon Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. And the Lord said to Hosea, “Name your daughter Lo-ruhamah—‘Not loved’—for I will no longer show love to the people of Israel or forgive them.**

No more mercy, no more forgiveness, no more love. You see, mixture in their devotion to God, had produced a life of disregard to the laws of God, wanton disrespect, blatant disobedience. A shameless dismissal of the fear of God. God says, “Enough – no more mercy, no more forgiveness, no more love.”

3. Third child – another son

Hosea 1:8-9 (NLT) **After Gomer had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she again became pregnant and gave birth to a second son. And the Lord said, “Name him Lo-ammi—‘Not my people’—for Israel is not my people, and I am not their God.**

Here is the most moving part of the story:

God says, **“You are not my people and I am not their God.”**

The Hebrew rendering brings out the tragedy in this story. The Hebrew text says - I am not *'eh-yeh* to you. Literally – I am no longer “I am” to you.

Remember Moses and his encounter with God at the burning bush. He asks God, “Whom shall I say sent me?” God replies *'eh-yeh 'ă-šer 'eh-yeh* (I am who I am). That was God’s covenant name to Israel. I will be your “I am”. I will always exist for you. But now this was the reversal of that covenant name. I am no longer your “I am”.

This is a divorce – the people of God had repeatedly broken their covenant with God. This time for the first time God breaks His covenant with His people. No more – it’s over. I will no longer be your “I am”.

The voice of Judgment – that’s what it was. Judgement was calling God to respond. How long will you ignore the wickedness, the deception, the open rebellion, the multitude of idols, the wanton disregard to the fear of God? How long? Your righteousness demands a response.

So God responds:

Jezeel – I will no longer sow my strength into them – I will break their bow.

Lo-ruhamah – No more mercy, no more love, no more forgiveness.

Lo-ammi – You are not my people, I am not your God.

But another voice resonates in God – the voice of Love.

Hosea 1:10-2:1 (NLT) **Yet the time will come when Israel’s people will be like the sands of the seashore – too many to count! Then, at the place where they were told, “You are not my people,” it will be said, “You are the children of the living God.”¹¹ Then the people of Judah and Israel will unite together. They will return from exile together. What a day that will be – the day of Jezeel – when God will again plant his people in his land.**

^{2:1} In that day you will call your brothers Ammi – ‘My People’. And you will call your sisters Rumah – ‘The ones I love.’

I must judge but I must also love. Like a lover who has conflicted emotions, God breaks out into a lover’s words again – But I will change it all one day – I will bring you back one day – I will make it right again one day. At the place where they were told, ‘You are not my people,’ it will be said, ‘You are children of the living God.’ What a day that will be—the day of Jezeel—when God will again plant his people in his land. In that day you will call your brothers Ammi—‘My people.’ And you will call your sisters Ruhamah—‘The ones I love.

God was saying, “I will reverse my judgment – I will strengthen, I will show mercy and forgive; they will be children of the living God.”

God had to judge but he had to love also – He is a righteous King but he is also a benevolent Father. And so behind the smoke and mirror of this story in the book of Hosea, we see the cross and the empty grave in display. You cannot have one without the other - judgement and love must go hand in hand.

Every Easter weekend we see two extreme groups.

One group celebrates the Passover, without the resurrection.

You cannot have judgement without love. That is just religion. The letter kills, but the Spirit brings life. You cannot have religion without power. The Apostle Paul calls the Gospel – “the power of God unto salvation.” You cannot have the cross without resurrection.

At the other end of the spectrum you have the group that celebrates Easter with fluffy bunnies and chocolate eggs, without the repentance of sin. That’s just blissful ignorance.

Both enslave – mere religious adherence and blissful ignorance. They both enslave a person to sin and decay. We see this happen in the story of Gomer.

Hosea 3:1 The Lord gave this message to Hosea, son of Beeri, during the years when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah were kings of Judah, and Jereboam son of Jehoash was king of Israel. ² When the Lord first began speaking to Israel through Hosea, he said to him, “Go and marry a prostitute, so that some of her children will be conceived in prostitution. This will illustrate how Israel has acted like a prostitute by turning against the Lord and worshipping other gods.”

After leaving Hosea, Gomer’s life spirals downwards into an abyss. She leaves her husband and children and engages in multiple relationships with other men to the point the story picks up when she has hit rock bottom. She is enslaved to a man who now owns her. She is the property of another man. Hosea responds to the word of the Lord to take her back and love her again. But he has to buy her back. She came with a price he had to pay.

Romans 6:23 (NLT) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

That’s the beauty of this love story - “Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover.”

That’s what God did

Romans 5:8 (NLT) But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

The cross and the empty grave – judgement and love – you can’t have one without the other.

The book of Hosea finishes with a love song

But it is a song composed by the Lord – It has two parts – one to be sung by his people; then God responds.

You can’t sing your own song – no, it has to be this song.

Hosea 14:1-3 – Sung by you and me.

**Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,
for your sins have brought you down.**

² Bring your confessions, and return to the Lord.

Say to him,

**“Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us,
so that we may offer you our praises.**

³ Assyria cannot save us

nor can our warhorses.

Never again will we say to the idols we have made,

“You are our gods.

No, in you alone do the orphans find mercy.

READ Hosea 14:4-7 – God’s response. (See scripture at bottom of this page.)

Between the cross and the resurrection lies repentance. True repentance – not half hearted repentance, not a mixed commitment to God wanting his favour but also holding on to our selfish agendas.

“Never again will we say to the idols we have made, ‘You are our gods.’”

We need to look at our lives afresh this morning and ask ourselves: What are the idols we have in our lives?

- the gods of wealth, possessions – our jobs, stuff that have become more important than God
- Not religion but a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ our Lord
- Have you forgotten your first love? Then return to him again.
- Is your life crowded by the everyday stuff to the point there is no time for God?
- There is one who loves you and me more than anyone on planet earth. – He is truly the lover of your soul – Maybe it’s time to make him first in your life.

Between the cross on Friday and the empty tomb on Sunday – was the silence of Saturday – a day to make some life changing decisions. Will life go on as normal or will we respond with total surrender to God’s will?

Without crucifixion there cannot be a resurrection

We are all in lockdown today. Have you thought how life will be when this is all over – go back to the same life? I hope not.

We have been stripped of our freedom. What’s the use of wealth when there are no shops to spend it on? What’s the use of a job when you can’t go to it? We’ve been stripped of all that the world says should be our priorities. So now is the time to recalibrate. A new commitment to God – strip all the other things that crowd out God, that take our attention away from Him. Then let us hear the one who loves us with an everlasting love.

Hosea 14:4-7 (NLT)

The Lord says,

“Then I will heal you of your faithlessness;

my love will know no bounds,

for my anger will be gone forever.

I will be to you

like a refreshing dew from heaven.

You will blossom like the lily;

it will send roots deep into the soil

like the cedars in Lebanon.

Its branches will spread out like beautiful olive trees,

as fragrant as the cedars of Lebanon.

My people will again live under my shade.

They will flourish like grain and blossom like grapevines.

They will be as fragrant as the wines of Lebanon.

I pray this blessing over you this Easter morning.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.