

Hope Christian Church
Todd Cravens
16 November 2014

Sermon Series: *Hosea: A Divine Love Story*



The Evergreen Love of God

A Renewal of Vows When the Repentant Returns

Prayer

Father, give us rest for our souls. May we find our rest in You. Cause all of us to run home to your heart. Allow us to see your life-giving goodness and glory as wonderfully attractive and beautifully pleasant. Draw us to you. Keep us from wandering from you. Jesus come now to us through your Holy Spirit and awaken our hearts to your love. Awaken us to our deep, deep, need of you. Draw us in to the shade of your shadow. Shelter our souls in the shadow of your love.

Introduction

It's hard to imagine how one will be received when one returns home after having run away from home. Especially if one returns after having been unfaithful and having hurt that one to whom you now need to return. Will she be received? Will she be rejected? Will there be conditions upon the return? Will the previous relationship be impossible to repair? Will the damage done ever be healed? Will love, true love—not Disney “true love,” but true, biblical love—ever be possible?

Husbands, how many of you would joyfully receive home your wayward wife who was pregnant with another man's child? Is that the kind of woman with whom you want to renew your wedding vows—with a woman who'd already smashed every vow she'd previously made?

The love of the LORD is ever green towards his chosen children. The love of the Father is ever green towards his children when they return.

Last week I introduced you to a young man who deeply insulted his father, even blasphemed his father, and then ran far away from home. We left that young man as he was limping home. The pain of his despair and the shame of his desperate condition had left him weary, wounded, and weak.

The road back home was long and dusty and hot. At one point he very nearly fainted. He staggered through blurry vision until he found a large Cypress tree, which he fell down under to get out of the hot sun. In coolness of the shade he began to come to his senses.

He looked about him and he noticed there was a stream running beside the tree. As he looked at the water he suddenly realized how desperately thirsty he was. He crawled to the cool stream and drank. He drank deeply. He splashed water on his dry, dusty face and rolled over onto his back to rest. He closed his eyes for while. When he open his eyes he looked up into the branches of the tree.

It was filled with fruit! He thought he must be dreaming. Cypress tress aren't fruit trees. Yet, he was starving. It had been several days since he's last really eaten. He began to reach up for the fruit. It was real! It wasn't a dream. It was what he needed. How could he refuse? He stood up, grabbed a piece of the strange fruit. It was the strangest fruit he'd ever seen, but it was the most delicious he'd ever tasted. He ate till he was full. Then he lay down and rested.

When he awoke, his strength had returned. He got up and continued his journey home. As he walked away from the tree, he turned to look back at the tree. He didn't plant it. He didn't tend it. He didn't cultivate it. But it just saved his life. He looked up to heaven and whispered, “Thank you Father, for that tree and it's fantastic fruit.” That was the first prayer he'd prayed in several years.

As he continued his journey, the thought came to him that he should probably think about what he would say to his father when he finally saw him face to face. A slight smile began to slowly creep across his face. A brightness hope suddenly entered his heart as he headed home to his father. With his mind now clear and his stomach filled, he began to plan exactly what he would say when he saw his father.

Repentance (1-3)

The first three verses of the last chapter in the book of Hosea is similar to this situation. Hosea does the speaking. He is speaking to the rebellious house of Israel who has run away from their God. Hosea is striving to lead them home to God. He is inviting them to repentance. He is encouraging them to return to God and he even offers to help them figure out what to say when get home and see God face to face.

Hosea 14:1-3 (ESV)

¹ *Return, O Israel, to the LORD¹ your God,
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.*

² *Take with you words
and return to the Lord;
say to him,
"Take away all iniquity;
accept what is good,
and we will pay with bulls
the vows of our lips.*

³ *Assyria shall not save us;
we will not ride on horses;
and we will say no more, 'Our God,'
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy."*

Hosea is no longer shouting a message of doom and gloom. Now his voice has become a wooing whisper leading Israel back to her God. He is now a tender spiritual advisor.

The Goal of Repentance: Return

Notice first the goal of repentance (v. 1). "**Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God.**" Hosea invites Israel to **return** to the LORD her God. This is a consistently repeating theme throughout this book. Fifteen times in these fourteen chapters Hosea uses the word 'return.' It is one of the dominant thoughts in Hosea's mind, and therefore, one of the dominant themes on the mind of God.

¹ The word "lord" when written in all caps refers to the personal name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which translates the four Hebrew consonants YHWH, pronounced Yahweh.

Hosea is not inviting Israel to a nebulous idea of God, but a very personal idea of God. He says, "Return to the LORD." The word **LORD** (in ALL CAPS, Hebrew YHWH) is the personal name of God as he revealed himself to Moses² before sending him to Egypt to rescue the children of Israel from the iron furnace of slavery. Hosea is not inviting them to return to an abstract, impersonal god, but to a specific, immensely personal **YaHWeH** God.

The Cause of the Rupture in the Relationship

Hosea is not shy about naming the cause of the problem. He states it very plainly. **You have stumbled because of your iniquity** (v.1). There's no question of playing the blame game. It's not king So-In-So's fault. It's not those prophets of old's fault. It's not the fault of the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, or the Jebusites. It's not mom & dad's fault either. Hosea says, "It's your fault. *You stumbled because of **your** iniquity.*"

The word 'iniquity' (יָוֶן 'āwōn) means "to distort; to make crooked; to pervert."³ Israel had stumbled because of her own distorted heart, and because of her own crooked tendency to delight in perversion. There's no one else to blame, except Israel herself. She went astray because that's what she wanted to do.

Application

When we wander from God, it's one's fault but our own. There's no one to blame but our own wandering will. James tell us, "*Each one of us is tempted when we are drawn away and enticed by our own lustful desires*" (Jam 1:14). When you wander from God, don't blame someone else. The fault lies in your own iniquity.

Hosea: A Helpful Prophet

However, Hosea is willing to offer his help. Israel may not know how to right this terribly wrong situation, but Hosea will offer his helpful advice. He knew what the problem was and he was willing to offer a solution.

The first thing he says is, "You need to go talk to him. You need to go directly to God and talk to him about this problem. This is a personal problem, he is a personal God, and the only solution to this problem is to work this out in person." Hosea advises,

Hosea 14:2 (ESV)

² *"Take words with you and return to the LORD;*

Essentially what he is saying is, "Go talk to God and before you go, figure out what you're going to say." *Take words with you.* True repentance begins with words. You will cannot

² Ex 34:6.

³ Carl Schultz, "1577 יָוֶן," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 650.

repent of a sin you are unable articulate. Don't say "I'm sorry if you don't know what you're sorry for. If you can't explain what it is you're repenting of, then you're not truly repenting. You need to find some words that indicate to God that you know exactly what it is of which you are seeking to repent.

Ask for Forgiveness of All Iniquity

The next step in repentance is asking for forgiveness. The ESV says, "**Take away all iniquity.**" This phrase (v.2) literally says, "forgive all guilt."⁴ Hosea invites Israel to ask the LORD to remove *all* of their distorted, crooked, perversion. He calls them to ask their King to forgive **all** of it. He doesn't want them to hold on to any sin. When you go to God for forgiveness, totally confess all your mess. Hosea wants Israel to know that God's forgiveness is boundless and he is able to forgive every wrong deed.

Accept What Is Good

The other side of that repentance coin is **accept what is good**. Not only should they confess what they have done, but also they are to embrace what they have not done. This phrase is an explanation that they intend to change their behavior by beginning, by God's grace and mercy, to do what is good. They are admitting their desire to forsake what is wicked and to embrace what is good.

It is Good to Praise

What does that good that they intend to do look like? It looks like they intend to begin praising God. Part of their sinfulness is that they have neglected to praise God, so now they promise to begin to praise the LORD as God. This is the last phrase in v.2.

The ESV's translation is awkward and confusing. The ESV says, "**we will pay with bulls the vows** (or, according to the ESV footnote), the *fruit, of our lips.*" This appears to mean something like, "We promise to express our repentance by offering you lots of bulls as a sacrifice." However, that is almost the exact opposite of what we read last week in chapter 6 verse 6.

Hosea 6:6 (ESV)

⁶ *For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

In this verse, it's very clear that sacrifice of burnt bulls is not what God is after. God does not desire empty religious ritual. What he is after is the love of the heart. So why would Hosea recommend they say "*We will pay with bulls the vows of our lips?*"

⁴ Thomas McComiskey, et al., ed. *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1992), 229.

The Hebrew word for 'bulls' and 'fruit' are very similar. The KJV translates this phrase,

Hosea 2:2c (KJV)

*Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously;
so will we render the calves of our lips.*

*Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously,
That we may present the fruit of our lips* (NASB; NIV similar)

*Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good:
so will we render as bullocks the offering of our lips.* (ASV)

*"Forgive all our sins and graciously receive us,
so that we may offer you our praises."* (NLT)

One verse from Psalms and one from Hebrews will help us understand.

Psalms 50:23 (ESV)

²³ *The one who offers thanksgiving [i.e. the fruit of the lips] as his sacrifice glorifies me;*

Hebrews 13:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ *Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.*

The idea is this,

Forgive all of our sins, and accept what is good;
that which is good in your sight, is not a sacrifice of bulls offered from a disengaged heart, but a sacrifice of praise, which is the fruit of our lips, offered from humble hearts which delight to honor your name.

God is not interested in detached, dutiful praise. His heart is moved by passionate, personal praise.

Name Your Sins Specifically

Then, Hosea advises that they get very specific about their sins. He notes two specific sins; 1) they trusted in military might of other nations, and 2) they trusted in their own military might, signified by the power of horses.

Don't Trust in Man (v.2a)

Hosea wants them to admit, **Assyria shall not save us**. Israel had repeatedly trusted in man and not in God. This is evident by the multiple military alliances they frequently made with the

surrounding nations. However, God is infinitely mightier than even the strongest national military.

Isaiah 2:22 (ESV)

*²² Stop regarding man
in whose nostrils is breath,
for of what account is he?*

The message is “Stop trusting in might of man. He can’t save you. He dies. So don’t trust for your salvation in someone who could die on you. How faulty is your salvation if your savior can fail you!”

Application

Today, I don’t think this is our idol. Our idols is not the military might of man, but the intellectual might of man. This is that in which we trust. We don’t trust in Assyria. We trust in Academia. We don’t trust in the idol of physical strength to save us, we trust in the idol of science to save us.

Don’t Trust in Horses (v.2b)

Hosea also advises them to admit that they have also put their trust in their own military might. They trusted in the power of the horse, or in military might. Don’t trust in powerful armies.

Psalms 20:7-8 (ESV)

*⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.
⁸ They [i.e. horses & chariots] collapse and fall,
but we [who are trusting in God] rise and stand upright.*

Militaries are good at protecting borders, but they are not good at protecting souls. Don’t trust in mighty armies. They collapse and fall. History has taught us this.

The Insanity of Idolatry (v.2c)

Furthermore, Hosea advises them, in verse 3, to confess the insanity of their idolatry. He says, “Say to God, ‘We will no longer say to the work of our hands, “You are our God.” That is insane.⁵ It is insane to make a thing and then believe that that thing made you. It is insane to cut down a tree, carve it into the shape of a man, spend hours and hours, cutting and molding and shaping, and maybe even painting the massive block of wood only to then fall down in front of the thing and say, “You are my God!” That is insane.

⁵ See Isaiah 44:9-20.

Mercy for the Orphan

Finally, Hosea suggests that ultimately they must appeal to the mercy of God. This is a humble admission that they are acknowledging their just alienation. He essentially saying, "Just admit you are not truly his child, but more like an alienated orphan, because it is in the nature of God to be kind to orphans. So humble yourself before him. Don't claim any privileged place of status as "God's chosen people," because you're not. Truly you're just like orphans. But do not be afraid because God is merciful to orphans.

This is the end of Hosea's advice. Hosea puts down the microphone. Now we must wait for God to pick it up.

Divine Response to Human Repentance (4-8)

How will God respond to such repentance? Will he allow this kind of treachery to go unpunished? What will be the divine response to this human repentance?

God welcomes such repentance and essentially makes four promises. He promises to heal (v. 4), nourish (5-6), protect (7-8), and to provide (v.7) for Israel.

Hosea 14:4-8 (ESV)

⁴ *I will heal their apostasy;
I will love them freely,
for my anger has turned from them.*
⁵ *I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;
⁶ his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like Lebanon.*
⁷ *They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;
they shall flourish like the grain;
they shall blossom like the vine;
their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.*
⁸ *O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols?
It is I who answer and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress;
from me comes your fruit.*

This, in effect, is God renewing his wedding vows with the nation of Israel. If Israel were to repent, then God would renew his vows to them. It's as if God were saying, "If you will repent and return to me, here's what I promise to do for you:"

1) God Promises Healing (v.4)

First, I will heal your apostasy. In v. 4 God promises to **"heal their apostasy."** In the eyes of God, sin is a sickness. All sin. Every sin. Each and every sin is like a sickness that needs to be healed. Unbelief is like a disease of the soul, but God promises to heal it.

God does not think lightly about sin. Neither should we. Jesus talks about sin in graphically surgical terms. Jesus said,

Mark 9:43-48 (ESV)

⁴³ And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. ⁴⁵ And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. ⁴⁷ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, ⁴⁸ 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.

Clearly Jesus is concerned. What he is teaching is that if a person does nothing about his sin problem, then he will die and go to hell. And Jesus would rather see you lose a hand, or foot, or even an eye, than for you to die and go to hell "where the worms and the flames are never ever put out."

Sin is a terminal sickness. It is a deadly disease of the soul and Jesus says hell awaits the person who ignores this problem.

Healing Involves Being Loved Freely By God

The solution to the problem is healing that comes from God. That healing comes by being loved freely by God. Spiritual healing and wholeness comes through unhindered divine love. God says that the person who repents and comes to him will be healed and **loved freely**. God does not promise to merely *endure* or *tolerate* a repentant Israel. He promises to *love them freely*. Being loved freely means there is nothing that hinders God's divine love. The one thing that does hinder divine love is divine wrath.

Anger Turned Away

God does not both love and hate a thing at the same time. If God's anger burns against a person, then that person will not experience God's love. However, if his just anger against all sin can be removed, then that person can stand in a place of love. The last phrase in v.4 says, **"for my anger has turned away from them."**

Application

The Bible teaches us that Jesus has done both of these things for us. He has come to enable us to freely experience all of God's love because he himself has borne God's wrath for us so

that his anger was directed against Jesus and away from us. Jesus is the loving lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. In Jesus God loves us freely because his anger has turned away from us.

2) God Promises Nourishment (v.5-6)

God promises nourishment to a repentant Israel. If rebellious Israel would return to her God, then God would not merely cause them to survive, but to thrive.

Hosea 14:5 (ESV)

⁵ *I will be like the dew to Israel;
he shall blossom like the lily;
he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon;
⁶ his shoots shall spread out;
his beauty shall be like the olive,
and his fragrance like [the trees] of Lebanon.*

In arid climates, water is a precious commodity. Israel would be aware of certain parts of their land where rain is rare. In these places, the morning dew is indispensable for sustaining life. God promises a repentant Israel that he would be to them like the life-giving dew in a rainless land.

And if they would return to him, he would cause them to blossom like the lily. He would cause them to unfold with great beauty and bring joy to those who were watching. Lilies make you smile. Their delicate beauty speaks of God's tender care and attention to detail.



God is promising that he would cause Israel to become beautiful, like the olive, and stable, like the roots of the trees of Lebanon, and sweetly fragrant like the cedar trees of Lebanon. If Israel would return to her God, then he would cause them to flourish in beautiful, fragrant abundance.

God Promises Protection (v.7, 9)

Third, God promises his protection to a repentant Israel.

Hosea 14:7 (ESV)

⁷ *They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow;*
The idea of dwelling beneath God's shadow carries the idea of safety and protection. It means being protected from the elements and from enemies. We may think of a mother hen protecting her chicks under



the shadow of her wing.⁶

Or, we may think of a large, expansive tree whose thick boughs block out the heat and bring shelter from the sun. In fact, this may be the image God intends for us to think of since he says this in verse nine.

Hosea 14:8 (ESV)

⁸ *It is I who answer you and look after you.
I am like an evergreen cypress;
from me comes your fruit.*



This is the only place in the whole of Scripture where God likens himself to a evergreen tree. He pictures himself like a massive tree, firm and strong, steady and tall, whose branches reach out around us and protect and secure us.



Think of the giant Treebeard from Tolkien's *The Two Towers*, as he carried tiny Merry and Pippin safely through Fanghorn Forest.

But God is much much more than just a giant protector. He is unlike an giant evergreen we've ever seen, because He is like a giant fruit-bearing evergreen. He not only serves Israel by protecting them in his shade, but he also serves them by giving them food.

Who wouldn't chose to run to this Tree? Who wouldn't chose to shelter in this Tree's shadow? Sadly, many don't. Many, many people run from this God rather than to him.

We will only ever return completely to God the Father when we become convinced that being with Him is better for us than being apart from him. This was true of Gomer & Israel in the book of Hosea and it was true of the Prodigal Son in the book of Luke.

Hosea 2:7 (ESV)

⁷ *"I will go and return to my first husband,
for it was better for me then than now."*

Here's what the Prodigal Son said,

Luke 15:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ *"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger!'"* ¹⁸ *I will arise and go to my father..."*

⁶ Lk 13:34.

What did he find when he returned home? A waiting Father to welcomed him with open arms. A father who ran to receive him. A father who was thrilled to take him back. No other religion has this kind of God.

No one will ever seek shelter under the shadow of the Almighty Tree unless he believes that his life will be better in his shadow than it will be without it. But to those who have ears to hear, God promises deliverance from the burning heat of the sun and a cool place in which to rest.

Concluding Call to All (9)

Finally, Hosea's voice returns in verse nine.

Hosea 14:9 (ESV)

*⁹ Whoever is wise, let him understand these things;
whoever is discerning, let him know them;
for the ways of the LORD are right,
and the upright walk in them,
but transgressors stumble in them.*

Hosea can only conceive of two responses to God. One is a wise response that chooses to walk in these ways, which means that a person returns to God and lives according his will and his ways. The other response is unwise. It is the way of transgressors who stumble over God's will and his ways.

Conclusion

Are you in need of any healing?

Are you in need of any love?

Are you thirsty?

Do you desire for your life to blossom?

Do you sense that there is no deeply secure rootedness in your life?

Do you desire for your life to be beautiful and fragrant?

Are you dwelling securely under the shadow of the Almighty?

Do you know that Lord is looking after you?

Is God the Father to you like an evergreen cypress?

The love of the LORD is ever green towards his chosen children. The love of the Father is ever green towards his children when they return.

God is the kind of God who possesses depths of love which we cannot completely understand. God intends for this crazy love to undo us and remake us.

Are you happily sheltering under his shadow? If not, then come home to him today. Come home and abide in his ever green love.