

Sermon Series: *Hosea: A Divine Love Story*



The Tender Love of God

You Shall Call Me "My Husband"

Hosea 2:14-23 (ESV)

*14 "Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.*

*15 And there I will give her her vineyards
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.*

¹⁶ "And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal. ' ¹⁷ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.

²¹ "And in that day I will answer, declares the Lord,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
²² and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
²³ and I will sow her for myself in the land.
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people';
and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"

Introduction

I can think of no other love story so amazing as the story of God's love for his covenant people. There is no more striking of a contrast than the tender love of God compared with the treacherous idolatry of Israel.

The Third 'Therefore'

The passage before us this morning begins with the word 'therefore.' Whenever you see the word 'therefore,' you should always ask, "What is this 'therefore,' there for?" Or if you prefer to use correct grammar, then you should ask, "For what is this 'therefore' there?"

This is the third 'therefore' in this chapter. The first occurs in verse 6, where God says, in response to Israel's persistent rebellion and idolatry,

Hosea 2:6 (ESV)

*"Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths."*

The second 'therefore' occurs in verse 9 and God says,

Hosea 2:9 (ESV)

*"Therefore I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season,
and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness."*

The pattern so far indicates that due to Israel's willful rejection of God, their consistent refusal to worship the LORD, and their willing embrace of idols and false gods, the 'therefores' indicate an increasing intensity of punishment. Let's pick up the train of thought in 2:13.

Hosea 2:13 (ESV)

*¹³ And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals,
when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry,
and went after other lovers
and forgot me, declares the LORD.*

Israel has celebrated what the LORD hates and they had taken their finest apparel—which the LORD had given them—and with it made themselves beautiful in order to worship idols. God says, *"They have gone after other lovers and forgotten me."* There are indictments against Israel in those words. What Israel was doing was evil. It is evil to forsake the one true and living God and then turn away to worship wood and stone.¹

In between the first two 'therefores' God makes clear what the punishment for their waywardness would be. Their sinful wandering would cause devastating consequences. As we saw last week, this is an expression of God's tough love towards his adulterous bride.

Therefore, I Will Allure Her

So when we hear the third 'therefore' in verse 14, we expect more judgment and perhaps even greater judgment. But that is not what we find. In fact, we find exactly the opposite. When we would expect the tough love of further judgment, all we find is stunning tenderness.

Hosea 2:14-15 (ESV)

*¹⁴ "Therefore, behold, I will allure her,
and bring her into the wilderness,
and speak tenderly to her.*

*¹⁵ And there I will give her her vineyards
and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope.
And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth,
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.*

The Shocking Language of Divine Love

¹ Dt 28:20; 2 Chron 29:6; Jer 2:13.

The blatant rebellion of verse 13 is shocking. However, in light of verse 13, verse 14 is mind blowing. Even though they have forsaken and forgotten the LORD, he then says, “*therefore, I will allure her... and speak tenderly to her.*” Israel does not deserve this tender love. What the adulterous people deserve is divine judgment. Yet, God in his great mercy, promises to initiate reconciliation with his wandering bride by **alluring** her.² This is shocking language and this is the language of divine love.

Don’t miss this. Hear this. Don’t miss the depths of God’s divine love towards his people. Oh that we had the strength to comprehend the length, the width, the height, and the depth of the love of God towards his people.³

The word allure, outside the context of this passage, means tender, yet even seductive speech. It is used in Ex 22:15 of a man seducing a virgin. It is also used of Samson’s fiancé who tries to seduce him out of the secret of understanding his riddle (Jud 14:15-16). In Proverbs (1:10) it is used to warn the immature from being enticed by sinners.

The last phrase in verse 14 expounds what God means by this word allure. He says that he **will speak tenderly to her**. Basically this refers to affectionate, emotional words that persuade one to a different course of action. Literally the phrase means that God will “speak to her heart.”⁴

God will *allure* his adulterous bride back to himself. He will not allure her with raw power or by forceful command, but by *speaking tenderly to her heart*. He aims at the heart and the means he uses is tender words. God yearns for the heart of Israel and he will woo her back to himself by tender words.

This is another way of saying “faith comes by hearing.” Being persuaded to return to the LORD happens through tender talking. Being convinced, i.e. *believing*, that it is good to return to God and to be near the LORD, happens through *hearing*. The means by which God woos and wins the heart is through tender, spoken words.

Tender Words Spoken in a Tough Land: the Wilderness

God says that he will speak tender words to Israel in a tough place—the wilderness. Why the wilderness? Is this more punishment? No. In this context the wilderness represents the place in which Israel’s devotion to God grew and became a place of tender dependency.

Jeremiah 2:2-3 (ESV)

² Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., “Hosea,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1385.

³ Eph 3:17-19.

⁴ Ibid.

*"I remember the devotion of your youth,
your love as a bride,
how you followed me in the wilderness,
in a land not sown.
³ Israel was holy to the Lord,
the firstfruits of his harvest.*

Notice again this language of love. God is recalling the wilderness as a place where Israel's love for God flowered as he led them and they willingly followed him. The wilderness was a place her *love as a bride* was centrally focused upon the LORD. The wilderness was a place in which there were no other rivals for the affection of the heart. The wilderness is a far away place in which Israel was removed from all other gods. Moses recalls that through the wilderness *"the LORD alone guided him, and no foreign god was with him"* (Dt 32:12). The wilderness was a place of love and childlike obedience.

Deuteronomy 1:31 (ESV)

³¹ and in the wilderness, where you have seen how the Lord your God carried you, as a man carries his son, all the way that you went until you came to this place.

God will lead Israel out into the wilderness, not to devastate her, but to remove her from all her competing false gods. He will lead her into the wilderness to remove her from all other competing voices so that she could hear his wooing words as he speaks tenderly to her heart.

The Valley of Achor a Door of Hope

God also promises that during this process of tender reconciliation to turn the Valley of Achor into a door of hope. Achor means 'trouble.' The Valley of Achor literally means "the Valley of Trouble." In the minds of the Israelites it represented the first national failure after they began to conquer the Promised Land along with the trouble that comes disobedience of God's commands.

The first battle Israel faced upon crossing the Jordan River and entering the Promised Land was against the city of Jericho. Joshua warned the people that keep none of the plunder of the city for themselves but give it all to the treasury of the Lord. However, a man named Achan took some of the forbidden plunder and kept it for himself by hiding it in his tent.

Then when Israel fought the second city in their path, the city of Ai, Israel was defeated by this tiny city. After they inquired of the LORD about why they were defeated, it was revealed that Achan had broken faith⁵ with God regarding the plunder that was supposed to have been given to God. As punishment he and all of his possessions along with the plunder and his

⁵ See Josh 6:18; 7:1ff.

entire family were burned and then a great mound of stones were heaped up over them as a constant reminder of the destruction that comes from disobeying God's commands. This took place in the Valley of Achor.

God promises Israel that he would turn the Valley of Trouble into a door of hope. The past failures would no longer loom over their heads as a constant condemning voice reminding Israel of her inability to please and obey her God. Instead, the valley of trouble and death from the past would be transformed into a bright doorway of future hope.

In That Day

As we keep reading, God's tender love toward Israel continues to turn everything right side up. God's tender love keeps upsetting the upside down world of Israel's idolatry. God's merciful promise of reversing the curse, continues. This next section (vs.16-20) will take place in that day, that is, in that day when God restores Israel to himself as a faithful wife. It refers to the day when intimacy and true worship is restored and Israel has put away her adulterous idols. It looks forward to a time of renewed relationship and restored faithfulness.

Hosea 2:16-20 (ESV)

¹⁶ "And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.' ¹⁷ For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.

You Will Call Me 'My Husband'

There is a play on words, in verse 16 that is easy to miss. The word 'baal' is not only the name of the Canaanite weather and fertility god, whom Israel had chosen to worship, but the word can also mean 'master' or 'husband' (Dt 24:4). The two words can be used synonymously.⁶ Israel had become so confused about exactly who her God was that they were confusing the two terms. Israel had begun to mistakenly refer to Yahweh (i.e. LORD) as Baal.

Julie... I mean, Jenny

This would be like the husband, who on the night of his tenth wedding anniversary, mistakenly called his wife Julie, when her name was actually Jenny, because for years he had been carrying on a mental affair with his college girlfriend whose name was Julie. And on that night the truth

⁶ 2 Sam 11:26 "Now when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband (ish) was dead, she mourn her husband (baal)." See also Dt 24:3-4.

came out. This is tragically offensive when it happens with your spouse, but it could be eternally offensive if this were to happen with your God.

It's no small miracle that God revealed his name to Israel. His name is Yahweh. In revealing his name to them, he was revealed himself to them. And now he is promising, "I will remove from your mouth all the names of your previous lovers because you will no longer remember them. You will never again speak their names because I will cause you to forget them. And you will call me 'My Husband.' What an incredibly intimate invitation to know the God of this universe, who created all things and spoke this word into existence, as 'My Husband!'

A Covenant with All Animals

God's tender promises continue when in v. 18 he vows to make (lit. "cut") a covenant with the animal kingdom. This is a reversal of the punishment promised in v.12. In verse 12 God warns that should Israel persist in loving (i.e. worshipping) other gods, then he would cause the beasts of the field to devour all the vineyards. Here his tender love is reversing that judgment. In v.15 he promised to back the vineyards, and here in v.18 he is vowing to prevent the beasts of the field, all animals even, from harming the vineyards that he would give.

A Covenant of Peace

Furthermore, in v.19, God promises to bring an end to all war in the land. The bow and the sword will be done away with and all war will cease. The result will be sweet and peaceful sleep.

I Will Betroth You to Me

Verses 19-20 makes the main point unavoidably clear. The main idea is repeated three times.

Hosea 2:19-20 (ESV)

¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.

What does this help us discover? God is starting over with his faithless bride. Yahweh is alluring Israel into the wilderness in order to renew the wedding vows, as it were. It's a picture of a fresh start. Israel's adulterous heart will be tenderly wooed to God and away from all her lovers. Then this tender response of divine love says, "I'm not going to take you out behind the wilderness woodshed, I'm going to take you to the wilderness wedding chapel."

Betrothal was the first stage in a marriage contract.⁷ It involved paying a price for the bride to her father and was the beginning of the formal agreement.⁸ In the eyes of the law, a betrothed couple were already legally married.⁹ The only thing that remained was the ceremony and consummation. God is here making a promise, to a presently unfaithful wife, that he is willing to marry her once again. He is willing for the second time to pay the bride price for a bride who actually is already his.

God very clearly describes the cost of this marriage to himself. He is willing for this marriage to be forever. On his part, he comes to the marriage in righteousness, justice, steadfast love, mercy (i.e. compassion), and in faithfulness. The price he is willing to pay is incalculable.

This marriage is priceless. How much is forever worth? How much is righteousness and justice worth? What's the Bluebook value on steadfast love? How much would you pay to receive mercy and compassion? How much does faithfulness cost? These are priceless qualities.

And the result is, "*You shall know the Lord.*" This refers to consummated intimacy within the marriage. The result is experiential knowledge of the LORD. The result of God's initiation of reconciliation is truly knowing God. This is not second-hand hearsay. This is true knowledge of God.

And this union will have a cosmic effect on nature itself.

"You Are My God"

Hosea 2:21-23 (ESV)

²¹ *"And in that day I will answer, declares the Lord,
I will answer the heavens,
and they shall answer the earth,
²² and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and they shall answer Jezreel,
²³ and I will sow her for myself in the land.
And I will have mercy on No Mercy,
and I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people';
and he shall say, 'You are my God.'"*

It is almost as if the whole world has been crying out to God for help, and then finally, when Israel returns whole-heartedly to her God, then nature itself celebrates and brings forth abundant fruit.

⁷ Walter A. Elwell and Philip Wesley Comfort, *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, Tyndale Reference Library (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001), 168.

⁸ 2 Sam 3:14.

⁹ Dt 20:7; 22:23-24.

It is as if Jezreel, which here probably stands for the whole nation of Israel, has been crying out to God for produce and fruitfulness and the grain and wine and oil have been crying out for life from the earth, but in order to give life, the earth needs rain. And the earth has been crying out for rain, in order to give life, which comes from the heavens, and the heavens have been crying out to God to give the command for the rain to fall, and then God says, "Yes, I will answer and give all that is needed." He gives rain from the heavens, and earth yields its produce, the grain, wine, and oil, which in turn can supply the need of many people and yet life comes from God and God will sow (i.e. make fruitful) the people of the land and make them fruitful.

And he will extend mercy to No Mercy and adoption to Not My People. Their loving response will be, "You are my God!"

Conclusion/Application

This passage teaches us a few things about who this God is who is named Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

1. **God will speak tenderly to your heart.** God is after your heart and he intends to capture your heart through the use of wooing words. We should never underestimate the power of God through the means of spoken words. This is one reason why the proclamation of God's word will never fail to be effective in the salvation of souls. "*Faith comes by hearing and hearing [comes] by the word of Christ*" (Rom 10:17). God has ordained that saving faith comes through no other means than by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we must not be silent and we must not be selfish with this great good news.

Do you hear him speaking to your heart today? Is he calling you to turn away from some idol that you are secretly worshipping in your heart? Do you feel unworthy of his calling? Of course you do! God only woos the unworthy! He only calls sinners to repentance. The righteous have no need of a physician, but only those who are sick.

2. **Don't view the wilderness primarily as a woodshed of discipline so much as a wedding chapel filled with words of wooing.** There may be times in our lives when we, as God covenant people, find ourselves in a bit of a wilderness, where all of the other things which compete for the devotion of our hearts have been removed. This may be a place of extreme frustration accompanied by a sense of abandonment. We may be frustrated because all the fulfillment we hoped to receive from the false gods we were worshipping, have failed to deliver. We may feel alone, but God never leaves his covenant people. If you feel alone and abandoned, and as if you are in a spiritual wilderness, then you must tune your spiritual ears to listen for the wooing words of God as he tenderly speaks to your

heart. Do you hear him? Listen as he is calling you to himself. It is his tender love which has silenced all the false gods in your life. It is his tender love which will wrap his arms around you as you sit alone, beside the road, in handcuffs, abandoned by all whom you thought were your friends, but really were not. Listen for his tender words as he takes you into his arms. Lean into him and listen to his love.

3. **God is able to transform your past failures into the ground of future hope.** The valley of death can be transformed into the doorway of life. This is most clearly seen in the death and resurrection of Jesus. His death and resurrection means life for us. All of our past failures will no longer be the means of our condemnation when we put our faith in Jesus, because the gospel proclaims to us that our valley of trouble—all that would bring guilt upon us and cause us to be justly deserving of death—has been taken upon himself by Jesus. For all who have faith in Jesus, the place of death becomes a place of hope—hope that all of our sins no longer have the authority to secure our death. But because of the death of Jesus, we now have the hope of eternal life. Run to Jesus and the valley of Trouble will become a door of hope.

4. **The appropriate response to God's tender love is the confession, "You are my God."** In this story, we are Israel and God's love is lavished upon us undeserving, treacherous, unfaithful idolators. And yet God comes to us with this same tender love and lavishes his love on us. The right response is "You are my God."

Is this a declaration you are willing to make today? It doesn't matter whatever declaration you made when you were 8? Will you make this declaration today? God is not interested in you making a past tense declaration that "You *were* my God." He is interested in you making a present tense declaration "You *are* my God today." Are you willing to ignore all the voices of the false gods who are fighting for your attention?

5. **God Himself is willing to pay the price that will secure your love.** There is so much more to say about this, but I'm afraid you'll have to wait until next week.