

Sermon Series: *The Book of Hosea*



The Tough Love of God

I Will Hedge Up Her Way With Thorns

Hosea 2:1-13 (ESV)

¹ Say to your brothers, "You are my people,"
and to your sisters, "You have received
mercy."

² "Plead with your mother, plead—
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband—

that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts;
³ lest I strip her naked
and make her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and make her like a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.

⁴ Upon her children also I will have no mercy,
because they are children of whoredom.
⁵ For their mother has played the whore;
she who conceived them has acted
shamefully.
For she said, 'I will go after my lovers,
who give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink. '
⁶ Therefore I will hedge up her way with
thorns,
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths.
⁷ She shall pursue her lovers
but not overtake them,
and she shall seek them
but shall not find them.
Then she shall say,
'I will go and return to my first husband,
for it was better for me then than now. '
⁸ And she did not know
that it was I who gave her
the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and who lavished on her silver and gold,
which they used for Baal.
⁹ 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.
¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness
in the sight of her lovers,
and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.
¹¹ And I will put an end to all her mirth,
her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths,
and all her appointed feasts.
¹² And I will lay waste her vines and her fig
trees,
of which she said,
'These are my wages,
which my lovers have given me. '
I will make them a forest,
and the beasts of the field shall devour
them.
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 her lovers
and forgot me, declares the Lord.

Introduction

As we have begun this new sermon series in Hosea, there have been many questions. I have been struck by how many people have had no previous exposure to this short Old Testament (OT) book and it's powerful and potentially life-changing message. This book is new to many of us. That's good.

The book of Hosea is the story of the life of a man named Hosea, whom God called to be one of his prophets. Prophets were God's spokesmen to God's people. Hosea's prophetic ministry began in 753 B.C. He was called to ministry to the northern portion of the divided nation of Israel.

Among theologians Hosea is often referred to as "the deathbed prophet," because he was the last prophet sent to the northern 10 tribes of Israel before they ceased to be a functioning kingdom. The northern kingdom was defeated and conquered by the ruthless nation of Assyria in 722 B.C. For about twenty years Hosea called Israel to repentance, but they refused

to listen to him and they refused to return to the LORD. And so they were destroyed, deported, and ceased to be a kingdom.

God called Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman, who most likely was a prostitute. Hosea did what God commanded. He obeyed and he married a girl named Gomer. God intended for the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, along with the children they would have together, to be a sign to the nation of Israel.

God intended their relationship to be symbolic representation of the relationship between Himself and the nation of Israel. God was the faithful husband who and keep his promises but Israel was the adulterous bride who had been unfaithful to her vows. God had keep his vows to Israel, but Israel had broken all her vows. God had remained true, while Israel had become like a whore. God uses a graphic living, illustration to explain the graphic nature of their sin.

We are now in the middle of this story. I invite you to stay tuned in order to get the full message. Today we look at only part of that message and these are tough words which illustrate a tough love of God.

The Tough Love of a Faithful God

The first half of this chapter is incredibly tough and the words are very tough to hear. However, you must hear them as faithful words and loving words. This is an intensely personal chapter. God does all the talking in this chapter. God uses the personal pronouns I, me, or mine 19 times in this chapter. What is happening in Israel is intensely personal to God.

Tough Words Affirm Covenant Relationship

You should hear these tough words as loving words because **they affirm a covenant relationship**. God does not speak like this to every nation. He only speaks like this to the nation of Israel, the only nation whom he chose to be his own treasured possession.¹ God only talks this way to those whom he loves and to those whom he has chosen to reveal himself.

Hosea 2:1-13 (ESV)

¹ *Say to your brothers, "You are my people," and to your sisters, "You have received mercy."*

The fact is that Israel was God's people. They *did* belong to him. God had made them who they were. He grew them. He caused them to be the nation that they were. Without his grace and mercy they would not be a nation. Their beginnings were completely owing to the mighty, miraculous work of God. Indeed, they were his people.

¹ Ex 19:5; Dt 7:6; 14:2; 26:18.

They *had* received mercy. God's mercy had long ago come to the people of Israel. God did not make them his people because they were the most righteous people in the land. No. They had no righteousness in them at all. And God repeatedly had to remind them of this.²

God's relationship with Israel begin with God's merciful promises to Abraham. God did not choose Abraham because he was the most righteous man on the planet. No. Abraham was an idol worshipper before God chose to reveal himself to Abraham (Josh 24:2). Abraham didn't just one day wake and up and decide to be a monotheist. He was born in a pagan, polytheistic, idol-worshipping culture and he would have remained an idol worshipping pagan unless God had been gracious and merciful to him and called him out of his godless pagan spiritual deadness.

But God chose to be merciful to Abraham by not giving him what he deserved. Instead, God gave him great and precious promises that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Gn 15:5). And God had fulfilled that promise. Israel was as numerous as the stars and they were living on the very land that God had promised Abraham that he would give his descendants. And they were about to lose that land because of their idolatry. Israel had forsaken her God and had forgotten him who loved her.

And so God reminds them that they were his people and that they had received mercy. These words affirm a covenant relationship.

Tough Words: Pleading & Warning

But Israel had turned their back on that covenant relationship. And so God warns them what would happen if they did not return to him.

Hosea 2:2-3 (ESV)

² *"Plead with your mother, plead—
for she is not my wife,
and I am not her husband—
that she put away her whoring from her face,
and her adultery from between her breasts;
³ lest I strip her naked
and make her as in the day she was born,
and make her like a wilderness,
and make her like a parched land,
and kill her with thirst.*

² Dt 9:4, 6.

Words of Pleading

Notice first that God instructs Hosea to plead with Israel. He repeats the word twice in order to convey emphasis. **"Plead** with her, **plead!"** God is a pleading God before he is ever a punishing God. Again and again he sends his prophets to plead with Israel to come back to himself. He had been sending prophets to plead with Israel to return to him for over **200 years!!** And for 200 years they refused to listen. They refused to return to the LORD their God. God pleads with them to return to him and put away their whoring and their adultery. If only they would listen.

Words of Warning

But if they would not return, then he warns them of what he would do. He promised to **strip her naked**, make her like **wilderness**, like a **parched land**, and to **kill her with thirst**. God does not hide the consequences of idolatry. He makes the consequences achingly clear.

These tough words are the opposite of the words of blessing God pronounced at the beginning of their covenant relationship. In fact, they are similar to the words of cursing that were pronounced against Israel if they were ever to turn away from God.

Deuteronomy 11:26-28 (ESV)

²⁶ "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: ²⁷ the blessing, if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you today, ²⁸ and the curse, if you do not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside from the way that I am commanding you today, to go after other gods that you have not known."

And **going away after other gods they had not known** was exactly what Israel had done. When God made a covenant with Israel, there were promises of blessings if they would love and trust in the LORD, and there were also promises of cursing if they hated him and turned away from him and went after other gods. These were the terms of the covenant to which Israel agreed. Evidently they forgot the curses, but God didn't. God does not forget any of his words.

Tough Words for the Next Generation

God's tough love has repercussions, not only for the present nation of Israel, but also for the next generation. The next two verses reveal that Israel's idolatry would not only bring God's discipline upon themselves, but it would also effect their children.

Hosea 2:4-5 (ESV)

⁴ Upon her children also I will have no mercy,
because they are children of whoredom.

⁵ For their mother has played the whore;

*she who conceived them has acted shamefully.
For she said, 'I will go after my lovers,
who give me my bread and my water,
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink. '*

This is one truth we see again and again throughout the often tragic history of Israel. The sins of the father's always seep into the lives of their children. When mother plays the whore, the children born to her watch deeds. They learn from her and they mimic her. Children always mimic what they see. This is the way God has wired us. And when the parents worship idols, unless a divine intervention takes place, so also will the children worship idols. Children learn what is important from their parents. Children will learn to worship what mom & dad worship.

Why did Israel worship idols? Verse five tells us. Israel worshipped idols because they mistakenly thought that their idols gave them bread, water, wool, flax, and oil. Recall who it was that Israel was worshipping. Verses 8 and 13 answer that question. Israel was worshipping Baal.

Remember Baal was the Canaanite god of agriculture and fertility. Israel had fallen so far from the LORD (YHWH) God who created all things out of nothing, that they thought that their daily necessities were coming from Baal and not Yahweh.

And so they acted **shamefully** by **going after other lovers**, namely Baal. They worshipped Baal because they thought he was providing for them. They thought he was in control of the crops and produce and of their ability to reproduce.



They were completely wrong. They were all turned upside down. They were worshipping a man-made, human shaped idol that did none of those things.

God's tough love would not allow this horrible misconception to continue. In his tough love he promised to correct it.

Hosea 2:6-8 (ESV)

*⁶ Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns,
and I will build a wall against her,
so that she cannot find her paths.
⁷ She shall pursue her lovers
but not overtake them,
and she shall seek them
but shall not find them.
Then she shall say,
'I will go and return to my first husband,*

for it was better for me then than now. '

⁸ And she did not know
that it was I who gave her
the grain, the wine, and the oil,
and who lavished on her silver and gold,
which they used for Baal.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness
in the sight of her lovers,
and no one shall rescue her out of my hand.

¹¹ And I will put an end to all her mirth,
her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths,
and all her appointed feasts.

Hedging up her way with thorns is a tough but loving response to Israel's idolatry. **Building a wall against her** to keep Israel from its idols is tough love. Taking back the **grain, wine, wool,** and **flax** is not unjust, because it belongs to him and not them. All of those things belong to God and not to them. He owns them.

This is not jealous insecurity nor is it selfish possessiveness. This is tough covenant love in action. The reason this is loving is because it aims at what is true while exposing what is false.

How many parents would sit quietly as their toddler kept running into the laundry room and grabbing the fabric softener and trying to drink it because it looked like milk? How many mothers would allow her two-year-old son to drink antifreeze simply because the little boy was convinced it was green Cool-aid?

How many fathers would allow their daughters to consistently believe that the big stuffed bear sitting in the corner of the room was one who bought all her clothes and food? It might be cute at 3 years of age, but at 13 years of age, that nonsense needs to stop. How long would you allow your 8 year-old to yell at the stove to give him some chicken nuggets before you made sure he understood that the stove could not answer his request?

It is not unkind for God to prevent us from seeking nourishment from that which cannot provide it. It is loving for God to actively oppose us in our seeking to quench our thirst by drinking a thing that will cause our death. It is divine love for God to hedge up Israel's way with thorns when she is walking toward her doom. It is divine love for God to build up a wall against Israel when she persists in hugging to herself the very thing that will pierce her heart.

An idol cannot make it rain. A stone carved into a human likeness cannot hold you when your sons dies. A piece of wood overlayed with gold may be pretty to look at, but it will never give you an abundant harvest. And so God, in his tough divine love, actively opposes idolatrous Israel so that she will say,

*"I will go and return to my first husband,
for it was better for me then than now." (Hos 2:7b)*

This is what God is seeking. This is the aim of this tough love. He is yearning for Israel to return to him. It is loving for him to make them so miserable that they would return to him since that which they seek cannot be found any other place. There satisfaction could only be found in him and so he will make them see that **things were so much better when they were with him!**

God gives Israel the gift of frustration so that she will realize that there is truly only one God. There is no other god who can cause the crops to grow. There is no other god who can make the vines yield juicy grapes. There is no other god who can make the sky rain and earth give forth its fruit. There is no other god who gives life and causes children to be born. There is only one God who does all these things and his name is Yahweh! And it would be unloving for him to allow them to believe otherwise. Yahweh alone is God. And he gives the gift of frustration to all who seek his company in a house in which he does not reside.

Hosea 2:12-13 (ESV)

*¹² And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,
of which she said,
'These are my wages,
which my lovers have given me. '
I will make them a forest,
and the beasts of the field shall devour them.*

*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 her lovers
and forgot me, declares the Lord.*

Israel took the provisions of God's grace and assumed they were the reward of their idolatry. She took the wine and figs that God had graciously given them, and they threw a party for Baal. They took the gifts of God and with them worshipped an immovable idol. Because of this God said that he would take away the grape groves and replace them with a fruitless forest and all the ripe figs, he would command the wild animals to devour.

How sad.

Application

What should we remember from these words.

1. **The tough love of God is only demonstrated towards true children.** God only disciplines his children. God is tough only towards those who truly belong to him.

Proverbs 3:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ *My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline
or be weary of his reproof,*

¹² *for the Lord reproves him whom he loves,
as a father the son in whom he delights.*

Yes, the words of this chapter are tough to hear, but they should give you deep comfort because that's what they are intended to do. God's tough love is intended to convince you that you are truly part of his family. If he never disciplined you, then you are not his child. The author of Hebrews tells that if you never receive this kind of tough love, then you are "illegitimate children and not sons" (Heb 12:5-8).

2. **Before God punishes, he always pleads.** God is not quick to punish. He is a God "*who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love to thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin...*" (Ex 34:6-7). Don't allow the enemy to distort the truth about who God is. Yes, he will discipline, but only if we disobey. Yes, he will punish, but not before decades of pleading.
3. **Don't misunderstand who puts bread on your table.** God is ultimately responsible for your daily provisions. Don't fail to thank him. When Jesus was handed two fish and five loaves and he lifted up his eyes to heaven to give thanks, he did not give thanks, he was not praying to the fisherman who caught the fish or to the baker who baked the bread. He was praying to God the Father, the One who created the fish and the One who caused the grain to grow. The grain on your table is his grain. The oil you cook with is his oil. The wool and the flax which give us fine clothes belong to him. Sure, we spun them into comfortable shirts and pants, but they come from Him. He caused them to grow, not us.
4. **Don't abuse God's gracious gifts by making them the means of worshipping another.** God will not finance the idolatry of his people. Don't expect God to bless you with an abundance when your intention is to spend it upon your own lusts.

Imagine your 14 year-old daughter coming to you one day and saying something like, "Dad I find living in your house kinda like living in a prison. Your rules squash my personal autonomy and inhibit the growth of my budding individuality. So I'm leaving. Now, I realize that I have no income to support my new lifestyle, so I expect you to provide me with a credit card so I can pay for my new lodgings, new clothes, nice food, and my cell

phone.”

How would love respond? “Oh, sure honey, anything you want! Oh thank for you allowing me to pay for your rebellion! I can’t wait you fund your moral decay!”

No. If she leaves, love would immediately cancel the credit card, turn off the cell phone, and get on its knees and pray that God would hedge up her way with thorns so that she would return to the one who truly loves her and do everything in its power to keep her from the pain that will come from those who will certainly abuse her.

Then it would wait for her to return.

The tough words in this tough chapter reveals God’s tough love for his wayward people. We are Israel. We are the wandering people. Our hearts have gone out after other lovers. We have mistakenly thought it was our own education and intelligence that has put the bread on the table. It’s not. God’s grace has put the bread on the table. We have thought that it is our own talent and skills that have brought us our abundance. It’s not. It’s only God’s grace and mercy that causes our cups to overflow.

Has God hedged up your way with thorns? Maybe it’s because you’ve been running from him. Have all the wild animals devoured the abundance of your fig trees? Maybe that’s because your heart is bowing down to another god, which really isn’t God.

Return to him. Remember how much better it was when you were with Him. Go back to your first-love. Repent and return to him who loves your soul.