

HOSEA 2:2-23

(Reading: Romans 9:1-33)

The Message From The Prophet

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

The concern of the Lord was clearly outlined through His calling of Hosea in chapter 1.

There we especially saw this through the names Hosea gave to the three children of Gomer.

But they were children who did not all have both Gomer and Hosea as their biological parents.

The first son was definitely from both of them.

But the other two are spoken of differently.

Now it seems some years have passed.

A time which has seen the children become adults.

For verse 2 of chapter 2 opens with Hosea appearing to exhort his children to reprove their mother.

“Rebuke your mother, rebuke her,” he begins here.

In other translations it’s given a legal connotation.

They translate the “rebuke” as “plead.”

But if we are thinking that perhaps Hosea’s domestic situation is being further detailed here, the words which follow point much more to a far bigger picture.

You see, it becomes quite clear that this is about Israel as a whole.

The case being made here is even more about the Israel’s relationship with the Lord as it is about Gomer’s relationship with Hosea.

How can we know this?

Well, consider what’s happening.

God is pictured as the plaintiff in a lawsuit, uncovering the unfaithful nature of His wife, Israel.

The verses 2 till 15 present the scene of a court in which the Lord plays the role of the judge, the prosecution, the punisher, and the peace-maker – all in one.

In this light we see that the children addressed in verse 2 are more than the three that Gomer has borne.

In fact, if the mother being detailed here is Israel then the appeal is to citizens within that nation.

You see, while the nation as whole has become immersed in idolatry, there were some who weren’t a part of that.

In Elijah’s day there were some seven thousand described this way.

They were said to have not bowed the knee to Baal.
And so there were always faithful folk, even if a prophet of the Lord might feel quite lonely!

They are the ones called to lift the banner of the Lord.

So, congregation, in the verses 2 till 8, WE SEE HOW BADLY THE MARRIAGE IS BROKEN.

The first aspect to the text this afternoon.

Verse 2 continues to point out who broke this marriage.

For who here has “the adulterous look” and who has the “unfaithfulness” between their breasts.

She is the wife called to repent.

She is Israel.

This summons to repent is enforced by verse 3’s reference to punishment.

To continue the parallel story lines, just as Hosea has already redeemed Gomer out of prostitution, so the Lord has done.

Indeed, the Lord adorned His bride with the most beautiful clothes and expensive ornaments.

He entered into a covenant with her.

To speak now of making her into a desert brings the connection with when the wife was given in troth to the husband.

For that was when the exodus out of Egypt occurred.

The wilderness then which was the honeymoon where manna came from heaven and water from the rock was now to represent the place without food and drink.

How bad is this?

Listen to how the children are included in verse 4.

They are not my kids, says the Lord!

So what does He owe them?

They’re someone else’s!

If we think the Lord is being unkind here, just read your daily paper about the latest paternity dispute.

Even if a man may have been involved in fornication and even adultery with a woman, as soon as he knows the child he didn’t want isn’t his, he lets the world know!

And then you hear some nasty things about her!

In fact, the Lord is being more than fair here.

Unlike that promiscuous man relieved to not be the father, He has always been faithful to His wife.

He was the One who took her out of that adulterous lifestyle in the first place!

And this is all the thanks He gets!

This wife asked for it.

And she keeps asking for it.

For while she is being obviously punished for her adultery, she still keeps at it.

Verse 5 tells us that she says, "I will go after my lovers."

And those lovers are the pagan gods.

There is where she has been getting her food and water, her wool and linen, and her oil and drink.

But who gave them all those things in the first place?

Have they come because of some Canaanite pagan idolatry?

It was the Lord who gave it to them.

And He's going to take it away from them.

The blocking and walling in of verse 6 will make that clear.

Because that will take her away from her lovers.

It will put her in a place far from their help.

The word "therefore" commencing verse 6 often introduces a word of punishment when used by the Lord.

The guilt has been shown and now a threat is mentioned.

Naturally, we think here of the covenant curse of exile.

That would certainly be a situation which would make the people think about what they've done against the Lord.

Then the words ending verse 6 make sense.

For then she'll realise she needs to go back to the Lord.

For then she was a lot better off than the place she's put herself in now.

How bad has Israel become?

Well, if we thought the pagan idolatry was terrible enough, verse 8 tells the real heart of this.

Israel despised the Lord.

She spat in His face.

Like some spoilt child she just went on and on taking the very best gifts with not a single word of thanks.

You don't like that in your child.

So how much worse wouldn't it be from your own people you have saved from slavery!

To ignore the fact the LORD God gave them all these things was a sin.

He had made it plain to them many times that He had given them all these things.

And they turned around and gave it to Baal!

Through what Moses had constantly written in the law; through the annual offering of the first-fruits at the feasts; they should have known it.

There was no excuse not to know it!

So WE HAVE SEEN HOW BADLY THE MARRIAGE IS BROKEN.

This is what the verses 2 till 8 told us.

And now, in the verses 9 till 13, WE REALISE THE RESULTS OF SUCH DESERTION.

Our second aspect.

There's an expression which goes, "you make your own bed and you sleep in it."

This tells us that we suffer the consequences of our own actions.

And that's certainly what the prophet outlines here.

You see, because Israel hasn't used her blessings to glorify her God the Lord will take them away.

And that might seem the furthestest thing away from the time of prosperity they were having under Jeroboam II, but it's what was going to happen soon enough from those invading Assyrians.

All the vines and fig trees, which Israel had said were from the Baals, would be turned into wastelands.

Where once there were rows and rows of the most fruitful trees there would be only thickets and wild animals.

This would also then affect her clothing.

She would be poor to the extent of not even having clothes to cover herself.

All her finery would be a long-lost dream then!

Keeping up with the latest fashions is the last thought on your mind then!

And then she would certainly have no attraction for the false religions, those pagan superstitions.

For like so much of deviant religion, you are only of some use to them when you have something to give them.

When you've got nothing they don't want to know about you.

This is what verse 10 declares as it says their lewdness will be exposed before the eyes of her lovers.

For it's not then the fact of her nakedness that's embarrassing but how poor she now is.

That's her shame then – and there's nothing she or anyone else can do about it.

Because then she will be in God's hands.

The hand, though, of judgment.

And that brings no joy.

In fact, as verse 11 says, it will be the end to all her revelries.

Here we note that the celebrations spoken of are the yearly festivals, the New Moon celebrations, and the Sabbath days.

So we have here the three types of worship the people were to bring before the Lord – the annual, the monthly, and the weekly.

These were the events which commemorated the Lord's great deeds on their behalf.
So the celebrations being taken away were those very things they weren't properly celebrating anyway!

Congregation, they couldn't pretend anymore!
All those things that they could use to show those troublesome prophets that they were doing the right things are taken away.
And so spiritually they're here exposed for what they truly are.

This is followed, in verse 12, by the removal of the physical things which brought joy.
The vines and the fig trees represent the land's rich bounties.
They are the choicest fruits.
But with them gone the land cannot anymore be the place flowing with milk and honey.
Baal would have no more pay coming this way!
And rightly so because the people believed them to be presents from those idols.

And then verse 13 brings the result of such desertion to a head.
For what had actually been happening on the days appointed to specially worshipping the covenant God was the worship of the false god!
Baals had been glorified then!
They had burned incense to them.
They had got all dressed up for those devils!

The description in verse 13 of Israel decking herself with rings and jewellery shows how much this involved her.
For this is what the women wore to excite the admiration of those gods.
And how much isn't that completely opposed to the solemn and respectful worship of the true God – the One who ought to be feared!

Well, where to now?
It really does seem to be the end of it all.
And then there's the word which logically join us to what comes next – the word, "therefore".

And what does it connect us to?
Which terrible punishment now awaits?
"Therefore," verse 14 begins, "**I am** going to allure her...".

You what?
These aren't the words of a severe sentence.
But they are the words of mercy.
For, congregation, in the third place, **WE ARE AMAZED BY THE HUSBAND'S REACTION.**

The Lord had every justification to punish Israel.
Everything before this has confirmed this.

But instead He chooses to love her.
The “I” here is emphatic.
It’s the divine initiative that’s doing this.
Because we certainly wouldn’t!
And just as well He did.
For we wouldn’t be here today as His people either!

And let’s see how He goes about this.
For He really gets next to His people.
Leading her into the desert here isn’t now depriving her of life’s essentials, it’s actually taking time away from all distractions to be as they were when Israel came out of Egypt.

The word here meaning “to allure” describes love-making without the ugly overtones.
For Yahweh is the God who woos and attracts Israel with compliments and words of love and comfort.

This is the echo of Isaiah 40, verse 2, where the Lord speaks tenderly to Jerusalem, telling her that her hard service has been completed and her sin paid for.

And we say, “Wow!”
This sure is grace alright!
It’s completely and utterly undeserved!

Now everything is turned right around.
Verse 15 tells of how all her vineyards will be returned.
You heard it – the thickets with the wild animals will be completely gone.
Even the worst place in the kingdom will become full of hope.
Because the Valley of Achor is the memorial to what happened after Achan desecrated the plunder dedicated to the Lord in Jericho.
That place Joshua 7 tells us where Achan and his whole family was stoned and their bodies burned.

Now, miraculously, this valley of bones will become “a door of hope.”
For God has proved He has the victory through His re-creative love for His people.

This incredible breakthrough will cause Israel to reciprocate in love and gratitude.
She now chooses to begin her marriage relationship again.
Just as she followed her God joyfully and spontaneously when she came out of Egypt, so now she will willingly and obediently listen to Him who’s her only help and sustainer.

What a day that will be!
And this is the expression Hosea uses here.
For we find “in that day” appearing three times in the rest of this chapter.

The first occasion is verse 16.
Here we see the church entering into the right relationship to its God.

The relationship we've heard that Jeremiah prophesies of the future.

A relationship we glimpsed at the beginning of this chapter, which we heard of in last week's sermon.

You see, God's people will have a relationship with Him which is not servile.

It will be warm and personal.

"My husband" is a lot more endearing than "my master".

And there's an added twist here.

Because the word for "master" comes from the same word for "Baal".

In fact, so close are they here in meaning that some translations have worded this as 'My Baal'.

Now, we know that prophetically the church entered into a new covenant through the doing and dying of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 4 verse 5 speaks of this as the time that we have received the full rights of sons compared with being children before.

But to Hosea's original hearers and readers this is a clear link with the pagan Canaanite worship.

For they had been enslaved under that.

And then they would be freed from that.

God is bringing about a complete change in Israel's life.

She will give up Baal for the only true God.

She will leave her idolatrous way of life, and abandon the whole world of ideas, beliefs and practices associated with Baal.

Verse 17 shows how thorough this reformation will be with the fact that those Baalish names won't even be spoken of any more.

Then we come to the second "In that day."

Here the future is pictured most positively.

And so it is that we come to the fourth aspect to our sermon.

For now **WE ARE OVERWHELMED BY HIS KINDNESS.**

Verse 18 says that on this coming day a covenant will be made between them.

The word for "make" ties us in with when the Lord originally entered into the covenant with this people.

For this word literally means "to cut".

As we read in Genesis 15, this was the ancient way to make a covenant.

An animal would be cut in half and both parties in the covenant would walk through that body together.

But what we note further from Genesis 15 is that it was God alone who walked through the cut up body.

This has never been an equal arrangement.

In fact, it could never be as only one of the two parties – the Lord – could fulfil His part to it.

And how much doesn't He show that here?

For God will restore the peace this world had before the fall into sin.

The peace that's pictured here through the rest of creation living in harmony with us.

The peace that's further shown through all the weapons of war being completely destroyed.

The Church will then live without fear or worry.

Indeed, what we read next in the verses 19 and 20 point to the most wonderful situation for the Church.

For this will be the most loving relationship.

Three times the expression "I will betroth you" appears here.

Congregation, this is a phrase which speaks of preparing for marriage.

It doesn't fit in with the restoration of a wife who's been divorced.

So this is a completely new marriage altogether!

In a situation where a valid ground of divorce was there, for she had been consistently adulterous, the grace of God goes further still.

As one commentator says, "The past is not only forgiven, but is also forgotten."

This new marriage would not be like the old one.

Because this marriage won't be broken.

Hosea uses five of the finest and most impressive nouns in Hebrew for positive relationships to describe this.

For in verses 19 and 20 the Lord promises righteousness, justice, love, compassion, and faithfulness, as the hallmarks of this new marriage.

Tell me, when has there been a dowry like this?

Where could there be better gifts to give to the bride?

And the bride responds.

Verse 20 ends with noting that she will acknowledge the LORD.

"Acknowledging the LORD" here refers to more than an intellectual knowledge.

This is a very practical word which expresses an intimate relationship.

It's a word that is used for having sexual intercourse.

In Genesis 4 verse 1 it is used to describe Adam lying with his wife Eve.

Someone who knows God this way cannot fail to love Him.

This Church will be faithful to Him.

Congregation, this will truly be a golden age.

The chapter concludes by bringing home the truly blessed time this will be.

Verses 21 and 22 tell of how all creation itself will be the joyful witness to this great marriage feast.

Here we find the name 'Jezreel' again.

But this time it will not symbolise the judgment about to fall upon the kingdom of Israel for now the true meaning of this name will be brought out.

For 'Jezreel' means 'God sows'.

This is brought out in verse 23.

Here the concept of God sowing is brought out with the reference to planting.

God's merciful intervention is demonstrated in what will be the new church age.

This new covenant sets up new attitudes and new conditions of life.

This is what Jeremiah spoke of in his 31st chapter.

Because here the old evil ways will be thrown away and a new marriage will begin.

Here Hosea comes close to the New Testament image of the groom and the bride, of Christ and the Church.

For here, in the words of Erich Renner, "the immeasurable love for the unworthy people of God by Christ, the Redeemer, is fully proclaimed and warmly developed."

This is what we read of in Romans 9.

Paul quotes this last verse of Hosea 2 to show God's unrestrained grace towards the undeserving.

This demonstrates God's sovereign choice.

And that's why this text cannot leave us just thinking about what God was doing with ten tribes who disappeared 2,700 years ago.

Though these words would have given the faithful in Israel great hope then, its full wealth is being displayed now.

In the words of 1st Peter 1 verse 10, this is the grace that is now ours!

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Most Gracious Loving Heavenly Father,

How much don't we thank You for the Son of Your love?

We realise again Your grace.

For You went out of Your way so that we now are on the way to that eternal place of peace.

Please give us truly grateful hearts.

And help us to so live that many more will come to know You too and so glorify and honour You.

Through Christ our Lord we pray, Amen.

