

LIVINGHOPE

BIBLE CHURCH

2 | HOSEA 2

THE EMPTY PROMISES OF IDOLS

All you really need is Jesus

Outline

Introducing Gomer

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REFLECT ON HOSEA 2:2-23

Call to Worship: Psalm 63:3-4, "Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. 4 So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands."

Introduction

Our message today is from Hosea 2, on page 751 of your pew Bible. The title of our message is "The Empty Promises of Idols."

WEBSTER'S DICTIONARY: IDOLATRY

What is idolatry? Webster's Dictionary defines it as: 1. The worship of idols, images, or anything made by hands, or which is not God. And 2. an immoderate attachment or devotion to something in the place of God.

D. L. Moody put it this way: "Whatever you love more than God is your idol. Rich and poor, learned and unlearned, all classes of men and women are guilty of this sin."¹

Idolatry is a worship disorder. We were made to worship God and be satisfied by him. An idol is anything that you turn to that takes the place of God. An idol is normally something that dominates your life. These idols of the heart may be an unhealthy desire for control, pleasure, materialism, or pride. It may be subtle, like the need to always get your way or the need to always be right, etc. It could be a life dominating sin, like anger, lust, or

ALL GOOD THINGS COME FROM GOD

I want to be clear. It is not a sin to seek godly pleasure. God invented pleasure. Aren't you glad he invented all good things? God created laughter, joy, freedom, sex, art, music, and everything delightful for your good and his glory. James says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (Jas 1:17).

We are to enjoy all things as we glorify God. But it is a sin to seek pleasure in any created thing, no matter how wonderful it is. God alone deserves our worship and trust.

Our problem is that when we seek anything in an unhealthy or ungodly way, we are breaking the first commandment: we are to never worship idols. An idol takes the place of God in your life. We must "flee from idolatry" (1 Cor 10:14). The apostle John says, "Dear children, keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts" (1 Jn 5:21, NLT).

That means we must never give worship and glory to any other, which is due to God alone. We are called to worship and "love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength" (Deut 6:4). When you turn away from this in the slightest way, you are worshipping idols. God wants your whole heart, your whole mind, your whole body. Are you worshipping him that way?

What do these idols look like?

DESCRIPTION OF IDOLS

Idolatry is pervasive. It's the constant lie of the flesh. We try to stuff all kinds of people and stuff where God alone belongs.

¹ William Revell Moody, ed.. *Record of Christian Work*, vol 40 (East Northfield, MA: Record of Christian Work, 1921), 539.

John Calvin said, "The heart is an idol making factory."²

It could be an **emotional** idol. You could be addicted to **control** and having your way, and you are good at manipulation. It could be a **behavioral** idol, like pornography or gambling or lying – something that makes you feel better. It could be a **substance** idol, like alcohol or drugs or food. It could be a **media** idol, like compulsive web surfing or use of social media on your PC or phone. It could be an idol to **materialism** and the accumulation of more stuff. It could be **people** idol: like co-dependence, or fear of man, of seeking the praise and popularity of others. It could be a thousand other things that take the place of God.

IT'S GOOD TO SEEK PLEASURE IN GOD

Our sinful heart has the ability to create thousands of idols. The root of all idols is the desire to please yourself above God. Pleasure is not a sin. We are called to "delight in the Lord" (Psa 37:4) and to have "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Pet 1:8). It is not wrong to seek pleasure. It is wrong to seek it outside of God and his plan for our lives. All people seek pleasure. The question is, how do we seek it?

Blaise Pascal said it this way.

All men seek happiness. This is without exception. Whatever different means they employ, they all tend to this end. The cause of some going to war, and of others avoiding it, is the same desire in both.... The will never takes the least step but to this goal. This is the motive of every action of every man, even of those who hang themselves.³

The one thing that all of addictions have in common is idols promise to take away the immediate pains and pressures of life. Idolaters are described as "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Tim 3:4). Any idol is a spiritual adultery for the child of God. James describes it this way.

You **adulterous people!** Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? (Jas 4:4a).

WE WERE MADE TO WORSHIP GOD ALONE

The truth is, we were made to worship God alone. He alone can satisfy all our desires. The Westminster shorter catechism asks: "What is the chief end of man?" The answer is: "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever." David enunciated it beautifully: "Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Psa 37:4).

We were made to seek pleasure in God. We were made to worship him. So then, when we come right down to it, we all have a *worship disorder*. We were created to have pleasure in God, but we seek pleasure in a thousand other places. As we consider a woman in the book of Hosea who was an adulteress, let's consider how God can deliver all of us out of our idols and the things that take the place of God in our lives.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ch XI, Para 8.

³ Blaise Pascal, *Pascal's Pensees*, trans. W. F. Trotter (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1958), 113, thought #42.

INTRODUCING GOMER

There was a woman we met last week in the book of Hosea that understood what it meant to leave her husband for other lovers. The Lord teaches us a lesson through her life. Her name is Gomer. Remember her name means “Satiated [with lust]”. We can call her “Lady Lust”. She is an adulterous woman married to the prophet Hosea. Her addiction is the pleasure and luxury of this world. Interestingly, we learn in Hosea 2, that her addiction is not to sex itself, but to the rich lifestyle that she can obtain by selling herself. She is not so much addicted to sex, but to material things.

The sad thing is that *her addiction to materialism costs her everything*. Remember as well that this is not just about Gomer, but about the entire nation of Israel who had become materialistic. And this could be a letter just as well written to you personally about any number of idols in your heart and life.

1. THE PRICE OF IDOLATRY (2:2-5A).

Hosea cries out: “**Plead with your mother, plead...**” (2:2a). There is a play on words here. Hosea is telling his children to beg their mother to return to the family, but it is truly a message for adulterous Israel to return to God.

God's Discipline

There is a high price for spiritual adultery for the child of God. The Lord is willing to **chasten** us because he loves us. Often chastening means loss. “For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives” (Heb 12:6). God is willing to take away your comfort if you give your heart to idols. He wants to draw you back to himself.

YOU COULD LOSE YOUR FAMILY (2:2)

Idolatry could make you lose your family. Listen to Hosea:

2:2 | 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.

HOSEA'S PLEA

Hosea gathers his three children around: “Plead with your mom. Beg her to stay. She's not acting like my wife and your mother.”

Here we see Hosea pleading with Gomer when he could divorce her. Isn't it amazing that this is a story about us? God could divorce us and send us to perdition, but in love he pursues us! Despite Gomer's adultery, Hosea pleads with her to stay. The idea is that Gomer has broken the marriage. Divorce is inevitable. But Hosea is still pleading.

Because of Gomer's “addiction” to worldly goods, she was willing to forsake her family and desert her husband. Idols have the potential to ruin your family too. Are you enslaved to an idol when you are meant only to serve God? It could cost you your family.

STRESS ON FAMILY

Living with life an overwhelming idol can put family members under unusual stress. Normal routines are constantly being interrupted by unexpected or even frightening kinds of experiences that are part of living with enslaving habits.

What is being said often doesn't match up with what family members see right in front of their eyes. The enslaved person as well as family members may bend, manipulate and deny reality in their attempt to maintain a family order that they see gradually slipping away. The entire system becomes absorbed by a problem that is slowly spinning out of control. Little things become big, and big things get minimized as pain is denied and responsibility is shifted.

Many a family has been sacrificed on the altar of anger, pleasure, materialism, lust, or an unsuccessful search for a happiness that never seems to appear.

I remember in the early 80s when no fault divorce became a thing. My mother thought she'd be happier with another man. There went our family.

People are willing to sacrifice their family on the altar of career, romance, alcohol and substance abuse. Some are willing to leave just because they can't get their way. Idols about in our hearts, and sometimes our own dear family is on the altar.

YOU COULD LOSE YOUR **MONEY** (2:3)

Idols can make you lose your livelihood. God says Israel needs to put away her spiritual adultery or else God will cause her to be penniless like a beggar.

2:3 | ...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.

Here is a picture now of Israel without proper clothes or shelter (**naked** and **thirsty**). Israel's livelihood is soon to be lost altogether when they are carried away to Assyria. Their trust in the nations robs them not only of worshipping God, but also of their livelihood and money. Israel was whoring after the world for satisfaction. Things seemed fine. This was one of the most prosperous times in her history, but it was soon to be ripped away.

We are called to "seek first" God's kingdom, and he promises that "all things will be added unto you" (Mt 6:33).

Here we see Hosea pleading with Gomer to stop her adultery, because she will lose her family and her livelihood. Isn't it good that God warns us as well? If we as Christians backslide and turn to the world, God may well need to strip us of our jobs, our incomes, or our bank accounts. And of course, it would be worth it wouldn't it?

YOU COULD LOSE YOUR **CHILDREN** (2:4)

Idols could even make you lose your own children. Listen to the warning the LORD gives Hosea:

2:4 | Upon her children also I will have no mercy, because they are children of whoredom.

God's people in Hosea's day has given birth to a generation that had no right to call Yahweh their Father.⁴ And so it is, that those who put idols above their relationship with God often lose their children to the world, like Israel of old.

How often do we hear of a self-centered marriage breaking apart, and then what becomes of the children? The children are never taken into account when parents put happiness above holiness.

Where is the time in the Scriptures for the children? Where is the time in prayer with the children? No time. Good things like jobs and overtime are turned into idols. Money and houses cannot replace the spiritual richness of God's Word and prayer applied to our children's hearts. Life goes by so fast, and before you know it, we've lost our children. Are they serving God? Are they loving him? Young parents, forsake your idols before it is too late for your kids.

Idols look like convenience, consumerism, social media and a culture that is entertaining themselves to death is what can steal the hearts of our children if we aren't watching.

These kinds of idols can keep us from God and his Word and keep us from applying the Word to our lives as well as our children's lives in a meaningful and sincere way. How many kids have been lost due to a parent's idolatry of self and neglect of kids? A parent's idolatry can be as simple as having time to binge watch TV or (fill in the blank) yet you have not time to care for your children's souls.

Your kids know if you love God. If you don't love God wholeheartedly, why should your kids? Is there anything you can name right now that is taking God's place? Be honest. The quickest way to repentance, forgiveness and restoration is sincere confession and forsaking of your idols (1 Jn 1:9). No idol is worth losing your kids.

YOU COULD LOSE YOUR DIGNITY (2:5A)

Idols could even make you lose your dignity.

2:5a | For their mother has played the whore; she who conceived them has acted shamefully.

Have you seen a Christian who you loved and respected fall into sin and suddenly, their blameless reputation is now gone? Their testimony is harmed because of an act of foolishness. I've seen godly people lose their testimony and their ministry because they wanted their way so bad, they stopped maintaining their marriage. They stopped disciplining their kids. They stopped reading the Bible. They stopped praying. People who stop worshipping God start worshipping other things and it leads them to do shameful things. They lose their marriage, their kids, their livelihood, and eventually, their dignity.

Losing one's dignity is not an overnight quest. Year after year, they practice until this loss of dignity occurs. If a child of God "falls" into sin, you know it wasn't a long fall. It was a long process of getting to that edge, but it was a very short fall.

Tim Keller in his book "Counterfeit gods" said this:

Most people spend their lives trying to make their heart's fondest dreams come true. Isn't that what life is all about, 'the pursuit of happiness'? We search endlessly for ways to acquire the things we

⁴ Garrett. *Hosea*, 79.

desire, and we are willing to sacrifice much to achieve them. We never imagine that getting our heart's deepest desires might be the worst thing that can ever happen to us. ⁵

The truth is, getting the desire of your heart, if that desire is not put there by God, is always disastrous. Without God we — “the creature in place of the Creator...” (Rom 1:25). No created thing can satisfy our hearts. Our hearts are made to be filled with the infinite God. Without God, we fashion all things we have into idols! The need for God is so insatiable, that without him, our hearts become “idol making factories.”

Can we now recognize the depravity of our own idolatrous hearts? The greatest and best thing that could happen to us most of the time is to *not* get our “heart's desire” unless that desire is the Lord.

JESUS PAID THE FULL PRICE FOR OUR SIN & IDOLATRY

What a high price we all pay for idolatry. But there is a way out. Jesus is the way (Jn 14:6)! Peter says: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (1 Pet 2:24).

The beautiful thing about the Gospel is that no matter what you've lost, you gain it all back in Jesus. Whatever price you have paid, you get it all back in Jesus. However sin has mangled you, it's “by his wounds you have been healed.” Jesus has paid your debt in full if you repent and turn to him in faith! That's Jesus' message. He said: “Repent and believe” in me (Mk 1:15).

2. THE POWER OF IDOLATRY (2:5B-8).

It seems like everything in Hosea's life is out of control. Gomer has left him and is pursuing her lovers. She believes that her lovers can bring her all she wants. Her husband and children are pleading with her. But thankfully, God has put it in Hosea's heart to go after his wife.

And God in the same way will go after his children. He will not let us pursue sin. He is pursuing us!

THE PROMISE OF IDOLS IS POWERFUL (2:5B)

Consider the allure of idols. Why is it so powerful? What would make Gomer, Israel, and us be willing to lose all or some of our family, livelihood, our children, or our dignity? What is worth losing everything? Listen to Hosea's account of Gomer's words.

2:5b | 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.'

Our hearts can never be satisfied by earthly things. What is it that drives addictions, idols, and adultery against God? It is the promise of **instant gratification**. Gomer's lovers instantly gave her the **wool** and **flax** for clothing she wanted and the **oil** and **drink** to satisfy her desire to eat and drink lavishly. **Bread** and **water** are good in and of

⁵ Timothy Keller. *Counterfeit gods* (Dutton: London, 2009), 1.

themselves, but our hearts want more than earthly pleasures. “The pleasures of sin” are only “for a season” (Heb 11:25). Our hearts can never be satisfied by earthly things.

Look at Gomer. She's willing to leave her family and go after her lovers. But she can never be satisfied.

“Hell and destruction are never satisfied; so the eyes of man are never satisfied” (Pro 27:20).

The flesh can never be satisfied. You can try to fill it and fill it, but it will never be full. That's why we must “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom 13:14). Don't try to satisfy with the flesh what only the Lord can satisfy. God “has put eternity into man's heart” (Eccl 3:11). Earth is too small to satisfy our God-size desires. Your heart longs for the infinite love of God. No earthly thing: no relationship, no pleasure, no success, or amount of money can fill the place of God in your heart. Your heart was made to worship God, not stuff or people or power. At the end of the day, Jesus is the **bread and my water** my soul longs for.

GOD'S LOVE IS MORE POWERFUL THAN IDOLS (2:6-7)

Isn't this beautiful. God is will to put every obstacle in Israel's way so that sin and idolatry does not destroy his Bride.

2:6-7 | Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. ⁷She 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.'

Gomer **pursued her lovers**, but she couldn't “**overtake them**”. In other words, the pagan nations delivered to Israel for a while, but then they stopped taking her phone calls.

GOD'S WALLS AND HEDGES OF LOVE

God says, I promise to put every obstacle in the way of your worship of idols so they don't dominate you. God says, “I'll **hedge** you in with thorns of love and build walls of grace and mercy around you. My **walls** of grace are so high you'll never be able to find your worldly lovers.” God's love is so great, he **hedges** us in by his love. He may bring intense suffering or sorrow in your life to keep you far away from idols.

Sometimes the pain and loss we experience in choosing sin draws the child of God back to the Lord. The child of God can never be successful in pursuing idols because God is pursuing the child of God!

God's purposes are positive and gracious, no matter how vexing it may have seemed to Israel. God's goal was to thwart Israel's heated pursuits of the Baals that she would change her heart and return to the Lord.⁶

⁶ David A. Hubbard, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 82–83.

GOD, NOT IDOLS, IS THE SOURCE OF ALL OUR BLESSING (2:8)

The sad thing is God is willing to give us far more than our idols promise. He says of Gomer:

2:8 | 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.

God says, "Everything you thought you got from idols, I gave that to you." Every good gift comes from the Father in heaven (Jas 1:17).

When we go after idols, we don't realize that it's God who invented pleasure, food, sex, joy, love, and contentment. We can have all those things and so much more in the infinite God. David reminds there is more joy in God than in the world. "You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound" (Psa 4:7).

God is the source of all blessing. Consider the words of modern Biblical counselor David Powlison (now with the Lord):

"We are meant to long supremely for the Lord himself, for the Giver, not his gifts. The absence of blessings – rejection, vanity, reviling, illness, poverty – often is the crucible in which we learn to love God for who he is. In our idolatry we make gifts out to be supreme goods, and make the Giver into the errand boy of our desires."⁷

IDOLS HAVE THE POWER TO DESTROY YOUR LIFE (2:9-13)

You always reap what you sow. Sow to the flesh you reap destruction. Sow to the Spirit, you reap life. Because of Israel's addiction to the pleasure of idols, God gives them a reverse harvest. They lose everything they were looking for.

2:9-11 | 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.

God takes back their food (their **grain** and **wine**). He takes back their **wool** and **flax** that would give them nice clothing (2:9). God sends the people of Israel into the hands of her **lovers** (2:10). They will be taken out of the land by the Assyrians who had provided protection for them. But in 722BC King Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) of the Assyrians leads the ten northern tribes into captivity (2 Kgs 15:29). They lose the land and all the yearly celebrations because she "went after her lovers and forgot me" (2:13).

⁷ David Powlison. *Seeing With New Eyes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishers, 2003), 134-135.

The pain of idolatry is that satisfaction in anything earthly is always *temporary* at best. They can come to **an end** (2:11), they can be **laid waste** (2:12), and **beasts of the field can devour them**.

NOT CONDEMNATION BUT CORRECTION

What's coming? "**I will punish her**" for worshipping the **Baal** gods (2:13). This is not *condemnation* but *correction*. God's punishment is to do whatever it takes to get Israel out of the land and away from the idols so that she can experience the love of her true Husband. Idols bring such pain. The good gifts of God are not to be worshipped. They can all be taken away in an instant. It's painful. But God never fails. He never wastes away. He is always infinite and fully satisfying! But how can a person be delivered from addiction?

3. THE PATHWAY OUT OF IDOLATRY (2:14-23).

So how do we defeat idolatry in our hearts? Hosea says that there needs to be a greater hope (a door of hope) that is greater than the false hope idols give us. Thomas Chalmers called it "the expulsive power of a new affection." He said,

The heart is so constituted that the only way to dispossess it of an old affection, is by the expulsive power of a new one. – Thomas Chalmers

The pathway out of any idolatrous affection is to find a greater, more overwhelming affection. There is, as this passage teaches, a door of hope in the Valley of Achor. Achor is the valley where Achan was judged for his sin near Jericho. And the only pathway out of all addiction and idolatry is to worship the one true God. An addiction to God is when we are so filled with him that we display his glory and love, and power and delight. We are so satisfied with him, we want to please him. Rather than try to stop worshipping, we need to turn to Jesus and worship him. Your heart will not be at rest until you find rest in him.

WE NEED TO EXPERIENCE A GREATER LOVE (2:14-15)

In Hosea 2, the prophet speaks of this wilderness as a door of hope.

2:14-15 | Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵And 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.

God begins by saying "**I will allure her**" or literally, "I will win her back." The word "allure" means to "draw, entice, persuade, seduce, or charm." You get the idea. God draws Israel and us with his love. He has the power of a greater joy than anything in the world.

God says "A day is coming when I'll open a door of hope in the wilderness." I'll not leave you in Egypt or in the **Valley of Achor** where Achan died outside of Jericho.

I'll be your true Moses. I'll bring you out of Egypt! I'm bringing you to the wilderness to make a covenant, like a marriage contract, with you. I want you to be my people.

HOW WIDE IS THE LOVE OF CHRIST!

How do we turn our heart from any sin that enslaves us or dominates us? By turning to Jesus and finding a greater joy and allurement in his love. Can you “understand the greatness of Christ’s love—how wide, how long, how high, and how deep that love is” (Eph 3:18)?

WE NEED TO EXPERIENCE A GREATER REDEEMER (2:16-17)

2:16-17 | 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.

The Israelites called God “**My Baal**” which is how pagans referred to their gods. Only God can “**remove the names of Baal**” and idolatry from us. We need his amazing transformation. Jesus is the only Savior that can bring meaningful and lasting transformation in our lives.

From the very beginning Israel prostituted herself with foreign gods. So rather than praying for rain for a crop, she prayed to the Canaanite Baals. Or rather than praying for health and help in the home, she prayed to Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab. Rather than wanting God as their father, Israel ran after the Sydonian goddess Asherah. Rather than flee to the true and living God for protection, she fled to Molech and to Milkim, the gods of Ammon. All these Israel call “My Baal.” They turned to the world for provision instead of Yahweh who was a divine **Husband** to Israel.

When you come right down to it, the heart of Israel’s idolatry was a mixture of *fear* and *pleasure*. They were afraid and wanted safety. They wanted comfort and pleasure. They were afraid they would lose these things. They sought worldly relief instead of heavenly connection and communion with God.

WE NEED TO EXPERIENCE A GREATER REST (2:18)

2:18 | 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.

An intervention must be formed by the strongest partner, who in this case is God. It must be agreed to by the addict or idol worshipper. As always, God has to **make** for us a **covenant**. God promises to eliminate any threat of war and gently encourages them: **I will make you lie down in safety**.

Sometimes addicts go to a twelve-step program. God is a one-step program. God is our safety. When we surrender to him in trust, he will keep us safe.

WE NEED TO EXPERIENCE A GREATER ROMANCE (2:19-23)

Now God uses the language of romance. He says, “**I will betroth you forever**” (2:19). It is here that God offers to renew his marriage vows to Israel.

A Personal Romance

God’s betrothal has four qualities: righteousness, justice, love, and mercy.

2:19-20 | And I will betroth you to me forever. ²⁰I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

God says, “**I will betroth you forever**” (2:19). Isn't it amazing that “nothing can separate you from the love of Christ” (Rom 8:38)?

Righteousness is God's integrity. He will do what he says. You are **forever betrothed** and united to God through Christ. **Justice** is God's leadership. He promises to guide us. **Love** (Heb, *hesed*) is God's unrelenting love or covenant faithfulness. He'll never let go of you. **Mercy** is the word for God's forgiveness. There is no aspect of God's restoration of us that is incomplete. We are fully reconciled to God. He makes all the provisions. This is God's pledge of marriage. The result of God's covenant is breathtaking: **you shall know the LORD** (2:20).

While a Christian can no longer continue in sin as a life's pattern (1 Jn 3), we do sin. Yet our righteousness is not bound up in our own record. We are robed in Christ's righteousness. We are betrothed to a perfect Bridegroom forever and ever and ever.

An Eternal Romance

God promises to provide material prosperity far and above the idols of the nations. This is referring to the way God as a divine husband will provide for his people. It's beautiful that the **heavens** and **earth** answer God's request to provide for his Bride.

2:21-23a | And in that day I will answer, declares the LORD, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth, ²²and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel, ²³and I will sow her for myself in the land...

This is a romance on an eternal scale. He's very likely talking about the new heaven and the new earth.

Since God controls the harvest, he will call on the earth to answer: **the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil** (2:22). But material blessing is a picture of a far greater spiritual blessing: God says, “**I will sow her for myself in the land. And I will have mercy on No Mercy...**” (2:23a).

There will be a response to this wonderful request for his people. We hear the conversation God has with Israel: “**I will say to Not My People, 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God'**” (2:23). This is the ultimate confession of salvation. We are God's people, and he is our God. This brings the joy and pleasure that no drug, success, relationship, job, or lottery ticket can bring.

A Worldwide Romance

Paul quotes Hosea 2:23b in Romans 9:25-26 to prove that God will have mercy not only on Israel, but that he will graft Gentiles into the covenant people. That means you and me!

2:23b | ...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.'

God desires to have mercy on the undeserving. God says in essence, *Stop committing adultery with the other nations around you. I will give you a romance of divine proportions.* Though I'm a sinner, he looks into my eyes and your eyes, and say, "**You are my people**" even though we are the least deserving. God can romance us infinitely better than the lost world!

Come to God, and he will be all you need to satisfy your deepest hunger. It is only by *pleasing God that we will experience the highest level of satisfaction in life.* It is only by experiencing the mercy, grace, love, and sovereign hand of God in your life that your soul will have "peace that passes understanding" and "joy unspeakable and full of glory." It is only when we realize that that we can say with the Psalmist: "As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God..." (Psa 42:1-2a).

Conclusion

Let me close with the words again of Blaise Pascal:

"There once was in man a true happiness of which now remains in him only the cavity and empty space. He in vain tries to fill it from all his surroundings.... But all his trying is inadequate, because the infinite abyss of his being can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God himself."⁸

Pascal is right. There is a void in the heart of man that only God can fill. For isn't the Lord's love "better than" anything this life could give (Psa 63:3)? We say with Paul, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake **I have suffered the loss of all things** and count them as rubbish, in order **that I may gain Christ**" (Phil 3:8). We long for a joy and a satisfaction that God alone is able to give us in and through Jesus Christ.

REFLECT ON HOSEA 2:2-23

1. What is an idol? What makes something an idol in our lives?
2. What are some common idols we all fight against?
3. What are things we lose when we start replacing God with the worship of idols?
4. What are things we do that put our children's spiritual life at risk? What are some things we can do that draw our children closer to God?
5. Why does Tim Keller say that "getting our heart's deepest desires might be the worst thing that can ever happen to us"?
6. In what way is it true that "the eyes of man are never satisfied" (Pro 27:20)?
7. Talk about a time of repentance and return to God in your life. What did that look like for you?
8. What kinds of obstacles of suffering or sorrow has God put in your way when you tried to go after idols (Hos 2:6-7). How are these obstacles like hedges and walls of God's love?
9. Have you suffered loss because of sin or something you put in the place of God? (2:9-13)

⁸ Pascal, *Pensees*, 113.

10. Thomas Chalmers said, "The heart is so constituted that the only way to dispossess it of an old affection, is by the expulsive power of a new one." When you came to Christ, how did you experience a greater joy than what you had in the world?
11. How is God's promise to "betroth you forever" (2:19) comforting to you? Isn't it amazing that "nothing can separate you from the love of Christ" (Rom 8:38)? How does God's love answer your doubts?
12. How have you "suffered the loss of all things" and "counted them as rubbish in order that" you "may gain Christ"? Is Christ worth it to you? Why?