
The gospel according to Hosea

Hosea 1:1-2:1

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Introduction

There's a verse in a Christmas carol that gets my attention each year.

*O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born*

Tonight I want to preach and pray in such a way that together our souls feel the worth of the gospel. That those tonight who long lay in sin and error pining will awaken by a thrill of hope as the gospel breaks into the darkness.

Here's my sense tonight. God wants you to know His love. He doesn't just want you to know about His love. (do you know the gospel or do you just know about the gospel? Do you know grace or do you just know about grace? These types of questions are likened to "do you know your spouse or do you just know about your spouse"?)

Are you following the distinction I'm making?

I believe the Lord has a surprise for some of you tonight. He wants you not just to capture the essence of tonight's message. He wants this message to capture you. Through the message of Hosea we are to recognize that:

Our faithful God turns our faithlessness into faithfulness by way of the gospel.

So what does all this mean? How can this message create a hatred for sin more and a love for God more? Where do I find the power to kill my hidden sin that has haunted me for years? Where do I discover hope for purity and a capacity to live a life of love and to experience a supreme joy that severs my love affair for this world? How will my inordinate desires be recaptured and brought into sweet submission to Him?

Tonight ready your hearts to hear hope. There is a deliverer who breaks into your downward spiral through the gospel, empowering you to face life's challenges with a clear conscience, and an inner relish that replaces the gnawing desires and despair with joy and contentment.

Tonight hear with your heart the gospel according to Hosea. <pray>

Please take out your Bible and turn with me to the book of Hosea where we will listen to the gospel according to Hosea.

The gospel according to Hosea

The original audience

The book of Hosea is found in our English Bibles near the end of the Old Testament. It is the first book of the 12 Minor Prophets found just after the Major Prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.

As you make your way to the book of Hosea let me set the scene for us.

Hosea was a prophet of God whose ministry was to speak against Israel's unfaithfulness in the latter half of the 8th century BC. (think 735 bc) The nation under the reign of king Jeroboam II was prosperous. Their borders were expanding. Their international trade was increasing. Their presence in the world was noticeable. Their enemies such as Assyria in the northeast were growing in power but still not a viable threat. This era was golden-like. We may call this: The Best of Times. But as we will see the best of times may just be the dawning of the worst of times.

As Deuteronomy 8 makes plain, if God's people do not handle God's generosity in a God-honoring way prosperity leads to complacency. And complacency leads to apostasy.

A smug, self-righteous, self-reliant condition leads to all sorts of evils. In forsaking the Lord for other things, His people travelled down the road of apostasy. They began to pick up the evils of the culture. They thought it was innocent to trust in other "gods" for their provision and protection. All they needed to do was be involved in false worship, have sex with temple prostitutes and call on the local so-called deity named Baal; a fertility god who was believed to be behind potency, productivity and prosperity. Of course one would still stay an Israelite. It is unthinkable to not attend festivals. and identify with God's people. Certainly we don't leave our religion. We just supplement it. You will get more if you give your heart away to more...

Leaving the LORD and pursuing idolatry the northern tribe of Israel spiraled into chaos; a disorder expressed in all sorts of unstable and rebellious activities. In the end they were overtaken by the Assyrians in 722bc and were utterly defeated. But God is faithful to His Word. He is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. His faithfulness in the midst of His people's unfaithfulness brought about hope for His chosen people.

Perhaps we could summarize the days of Hosea like this: Prosperity handled unbiblically gave rise to complacency. Left unchecked this led to apostasy. Apostasy (turning away from God to pursue idols) placed people under the wrath of God. Deliverance from God's righteous anger came only from His merciful initiative. And that initiative is known as the gospel.

Tonight's audience

But some tonight may say, "That was 2,700 years ago. I don't bow to a wooden image? I'm not going to temple cults and having sex with prostitutes. I'm a good person and would never get caught up in worldly ways.

Let me ask you a question or two.

1. Do you pray in heart-felt ways?
2. Do you laugh at unkind jokes?
3. Do you talk behind people's backs?
4. Are you dazzled by videos and bored by Bible?
5. Is gathering with God's people a duty or delight?
6. Is your Bible reading little to non-existent?
7. Do you feel like you know about God but not really know Him?
8. Are sermons the time you get to think about weekly responsibilities?
9. Are you afraid that someone will get to know you and not like you?
10. Do you pretend a lot?

From Dayton to Cincinnati, it is not uncommon to hear "drunks on the street say they believe Jesus. Unmarried couples sleeping together say they believe. Elderly people who haven't sought worship or fellowship for forty years say they believe. All kinds of lukewarm, world-loving church attenders say they believe"ⁱ.

Tonight's message titled the gospel according to Hosea aims at our hearts. Its purpose is to awaken us from complacency toward Him and lead us into intimacy with Him. And so...

To be stabbed awake and feel the worth of the gospel, we will look at 5 facets of Hosea's message: Sin. Judgment. Grace. Mission. Family.

Sin

v1-2

To know the gospel we need to know the nature of sin.

Here in v1-2 we come to the problem of the northern tribes of Israel. They are forsaking the Lord. The shocking thing about the LORD's description of their problem is what God calls it. Whoredom. (An older word for prostitution). Take a listen as I read v1-2

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.² When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord."

Undoubtedly this description had some literal meaning to it. Many of the Israelites; from the leaders down to the common people, were embracing Baalism; a cult whose practices in worshipping their false god was prostitution. Thinking that sex with prostitutes will encourage the false god of the day to release prosperity for his people sounds really weird to us. But not to them. Remember; sin is not logical. It is senseless. It is stupid.

To understand the nature of sin we need to hear what the Lord calls sin. The LORD calls sin as a covenant relationship broken by abandonment. Or in other words, sin is spiritual adultery.

Sin is not just bad behavior that hurts people. The comparison between marital infidelity and Israel's failure to uphold their covenant relationship with the LORD frames Hosea's theology of sin.

The Lord through Hosea likens sin as giving away something sacred to receive something "better"? Listen to how the LORD describes sin in other places in Hosea.

2:5 – For their mother has played the whore...she said, "I will go after my lovers who give my bread and my water..."

4:1 – there is no faithfulness or steadfast love and no knowledge of God in the land

5:3 – O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled.

7:13 – they have strayed from Me...they have rebelled against Me...they speak lies against Me...

8:14 – Israel has forgotten his Maker...

11:7 – My people are bent on turning away from Me.

13:2 – they sin more and more...it is said of them [that they] kiss calves.

The take away from all this beloved is this. Sin is perverted. Sin is ignorant. Sin is arrogant. Sin is abandonment. Sin loves substitutes. Sin hates God. Sin is personal. Sin is ugly. Sin is insane. Sin matters. Sin will be punished as we notice in verses 3-9.

Judgment

v3-9

To be aroused out of complacency and be drawn into His intimacy we need to know not only the nature of sin but next we need to know of the judgment of God.

In v3-9 the structure of this narrative segment is ordered around Hosea's marriage and the subsequent birth of three children. As I read it for us, note how each name symbolically represents what is happening among the people in Israel. You will hear a son named Jezreel – this was a valley in the land of Israel in which a bloody massacre took place. Next we hear of a girl born to Gomer whose was named by God as LoRuama – the word means No Mercy. And finally we come to the third and last child named by God as LoAmmi – the word means Not my people. Take a listen as I read v3-9.

So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.⁴ And the Lord said to him, "Call his name Jezreel, for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 And on that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."

6 She conceived again and bore a daughter. And the Lord said to him, "Call her name Lo-ruhama,, for I will no more have mercy on the house of Israel, to forgive them at all.

7 But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and I will save them by the Lord their God. I will not save them by bow or by sword or by war or by horses or by horsemen."

8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhama, she conceived and bore a son. 9 And the Lord said, "Call his name Lo-ammi,, for you are not my people, and I am not your God."

The chill of these words can be felt. The passage says, "in just a little while I will punish". The initial expression of this punishment came when Assyria invaded the northern kingdom. A ruthless King Tiglath-Pileser and his army defeated the northern kingdom and took the Israelites into captivity. They did this in 722bc with brutality and cruelty - exterminating them as filthy cockroaches.

But in the midst of God's judgment the LORD spared the southern kingdom...at least for another 150 yrs. or so. They too went off into captivity under the Babylonian regime.

In other places in the book of Hosea judgment is described as graphically. For example:

5:8 – Blow the horn in Gibeah , the trumpet in Ramah = Gibeah and Ramah are Isreal's southern boarder telling the reader that the threat coming from the north will sweep over every inch of the 10 tribes of Israel. Nothing and nobody will be spared.

5:10 – I will pour out my wrath like water = Gen.7:11ff. a deluge drowning all in its way.

5:12 – I am like a moth to Ephraim and like dry rot to the house of Judah = wrath will overtake and gobble up its prey.

5:14 – I will be like a lion to Ephraim. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off and no one shall rescue. = wrath cannot be overcome by man. It tears flesh from bone leaving the opponent writhing in agony.

All this talk of judgment coming upon Israel occurred in 722bc. But was that all the Spirit of God had in mind when He brought this word through Hosea to these people. Perhaps this historic event though historic and awful is but a foretaste of some greater judgment looming on the horizon. Could it be that we are seeing a trailer of the upcoming movie that features the second coming of the King. A reality of infinite dread. A misery of endless purport ion. Hell awaits those who do not believe the gospel.

So here we sit in Springboro, in comfortable chairs, in an auditorium listening to very disturbing words and uncomfortable with very disturbing imagery.

Why are we doing this again? What is the purpose of all this dread?

The shocking word pictures of Hosea, the scandalous phrases found in this book, the disgusting imagery filling this book has a purpose. any who are comfortable with sin must be stabbed awake out of complacency so that they can feel the good news of great joy. There is hope for sinners. But hope does not dawn in a heart that feels nothing.

And so...

to be aroused out of complacency and be drawn into His intimacy ; to be shocked out of casual and careless living into knowing in a heart-felt way the gospel we need to:

- Know the nature of sin
- Know the dread of judgment

Now we are ready to come down from the tornado of wrath and set down in the land of Oz. We are to open the door and see the multi-colored, dazzling array of beauty found in the gospel. And we see this in verse 10.

Grace

v10

To know the gospel we need to know the grace of God.

In contrast to the thunder and lightning of v3-9 we read v10.

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured or numbered. And in the place where it was said to them, "You are not my people," it shall be said to them, "Children of the living God."

God's people had been unfaithful; so their relationship with God appeared to be finished. Except this wasn't going to be the end.

There are amazing "not this but that" in the Bible; contrasts where it all looks hopeless until God steps in with His mercy and grace. We find one of these contrasts in v10.

We see that judgment does not get the last word. We see that God is faithful to His covenant He gave to Abraham when He said, "I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is no the seashore (Gen.22:17).

When did the Lord achieve this remarkable grace for undeserving people we see in Hosea? Who are these people said to be "you are not my people" that become "children of the living God"? Is it just Jews? Does this apply to people only 2,700 years ago?

The New Testament writers inspired by God wrote about you and me! Paul in Romans 9:23f quotes this verse to say, "to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy which he has prepared beforehand for glory – even us whom he has called not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles. As it is written, "those who were not my people I will call my people and her who was not beloved I will call beloved.

Beloved let this caress your hearts. Hear the love song sung over all who are born again and in Jesus Christ.

Jesus bore our sins on the cross to satisfy the just requirements of the law and satisfy the righteous anger of God against our sin. He paid it all. He accomplished what we cannot do; namely to win God's favor forever. This is the grace of God. This is the fulfillment of Hosea 1:10. The Abrahamic covenant was upheld by the Messiah. Jesus won all the promised blessings for His people.

Can you feel the worth of the gospel? Is the thrill of hope awakening your soul? Fall on your knees in holy submission to the Lord God Almighty.

What does this gospel create? We close this evening with the results of the gospel found in the last two verses of our texts tonight.

Mission

v11

First, the gospel creates mission.

To know the gospel sends us out on mission. This we see in v11. As I read this verse, think about how this verse ultimately gets expressed. When does v11 find its fullest manifestation? Where do you see in the Bible the gathering of God's people? Take a listen as I read v11.

And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together, and they shall appoint for themselves one head. And they shall go up from the land, for great shall be the day of Jezreel.

Undoubtedly the Israelites would have heard hope about a future exodus; a coming out of foreign land; leaving the enemies in order to return home. But let me ask you this question. How is the mission of the first disciples the fulfillment of God's promise in Hos.1:11? When did God's people start to be found and gathered under one head?

Acts 1:8 (quote) – they went out to the Jews first and then the Gentiles. They went out with the gospel in the power of the Spirit. They went out to find God's elect who were scattered throughout the entire world. His people came out of captivity to Satan and brought home to Jesus under whom we live as having one head.

These people are found throughout the whole world. The gospel causes conversion and creates local churches all over the place.

This was the first century's mission. Praise God the following centuries saw it as their mission too. This is how the gospel got to us tonight. And this is how the gospel will get to others tomorrow.

To feel the worth of the gospel gives rise to fresh participation in the mission of the local church – sent into the world to witness of the gospel.

And when the grace of God gathers up people into a local church what do we find there?

Turn your eyes upon 2:1 and notice the last evidence of people awakened by the gospel.

Family

2:1

To experientially know the gospel brings about sweet fellowship. Take a listen as I read our last verse of the evening.

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

With gospel robustly living in our hearts the gospel richly is expressed through our lips. This verse is amazing. We are told to say things to each other. We are commanded to speak to one another. We must never withhold words of gospel realities from our spiritual siblings. We are brothers and sisters of each other. And we have a word ministry for each other. What is it?

Say to one another – “You are my people”. Each of us is a mouthpiece (i.e. representative) of God. We prophetically speak to each other the very words of God who says ongoingly,

“ you are my people. You have received mercy”.

To take this message to heart and have it come out from both our lips and lives here are a few closing questions.

- ❖ In light of the nature of sin...
 - do you feel the repulsiveness of sin?
- ❖ In light of the wrath of God...
 - Do you feel the dread of His anger toward sin?
- ❖ In light of the grace of God...
 - Do you feel the love of God?
- ❖ In light of the mission of God...
 - Do you feel the exhilaration of being a witness for God?
- ❖ In light of the family of God...
 - Do you feel warmth for His people?

(Exhorting the people to believe the gospel in the above heart-felt way.)

ⁱ The observations and descriptions found in quotations are taken from Dr. Piper’s “Desiring God”; p.42.