

Janus, or Marriage Counseling

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Hosea 1:2-10

“...the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea...”

Movement 1 – The Odd Story of Hosea

Hosea’s life was a prophesy. Hosea did not just speak the word of the Lord; he lived the word of the Lord. You did not have to listen to Hosea, you just had to watch him, observe him, and you knew what God was saying through him. Hosea’s life was a prophesy.

It started with his marriage. One would have expected Hosea to marry someone who was a quiet, supportive housewife. One would have expected Hosea to marry a good Jewish girl who would take care of the home while Hosea went out declaring, “thus says the Lord.” Hosea married a wife of whoredom, an adulterous woman, a woman with little reputable standing. Maybe she was a prostitute, or maybe she just was someone who had a reputation as one who slept around. What a shock this was for a man of Hosea’s standing, for someone who claimed to be able to speak on God’s behalf to marry someone of such questionable character. You could almost hear the hushed whispers, the scornful glances, the disapproving glairs towards Hosea and Gomer, his wife. This was not a suitable wife for Hosea, because this was someone who has slept and most likely would sleep with other men, who would disrespect Hosea, and who would bring disrespect to Hosea’s name. Yet Hosea followed the calling of the Lord and married a woman described as a whore, a prostitute, or a woman of ill repute. Hosea’s life was a prophesy.

It was a marriage to make a point. It was a marriage that was intended to shock others, and to make people think. It reminds me of Scarlett O’Hare’s first marriage to Charles Hamilton from the novel and movie *Gone With the Wind*. She married Hamilton, a weak, sniveling individual to make a point to her true love Ashley Wilkes who was marrying someone else. She married someone who she did not respect, who could not match her fire, and who she would never love just to make Ashley jealous. Scarlett was using her marriage to show how she felt. Hosea was using his marriage to show how God felt; his life was a prophesy.

Yet the prophesy did not stop there. Hosea’s life did not stop with an unseemly, unacceptable marriage. Hosea then took on the task of naming his children as a part of his prophetic life, and he was not kind according to conventional standards. The name of his first-born, “Jezreel” may have seemed somewhat acceptable at first glance. Jezreel was a place of beauty, it was a fertile place, and may have seemed unusual, but was still an acceptable name. It is not unheard of to name a child after a geographical location. Yet in the last thirty years of Israel’s history, Jezreel was a place of great bloodshed. It was the place where Jehu, a leader of the Israelites, attacked and defeated the leaders of Baal. Yet Jehu did not only defeat the kings who were leading the people to worship Baal, but also murdered all of the priests, the servants, and everyone who was slightly connected to Baal. It was the place of a bloody and violent massacre. It was a place that would always carry a connotation of death and destruction. It would be like a member of the Dakota Sioux naming a child “Wounded Knee” or a holocaust survivor naming a child

Auschwitz, or a Japanese citizen to name a child Hiroshima. These are names of places that evoke death, destruction and great violence.

Yet the prophesy did not stop there. Hosea named his next child, “Lo-ruhamah” which means “I will no longer have pity.” This is not a normal name by any stretch of the imagination. This is not a name that kids call out in the playground. This is not even a name of a place. It is a name that is a statement. It is a name that constantly threatens, confronts and challenges the people. “The Lord will not have pity.” This prophetic claim is made without saying a word, the name of the child declares the claim of the Lord. It was a name that spoke trouble and distress.

Yet the prophetic life of Hosea did not stop there. Hosea and Gomer had a third child and named him “Lo-ammi,” which means, “I am not your God.” Again, this is not a normal name. This is not an accepted name. It is not a name you will hear during a ball game or a name game in school. Again, without saying anything, Hosea’s son speaks volumes to the people; the Lord is not your God. Another name that speaks trouble and distress.

Hosea’s life was a prophesy. We have heard of people giving odd names to children before. The actor, Rob Murrow (*Northern Exposure* and *Numbers*) named his child “To.” Frank Zappa named his children Moon Unit and Dweezil, and his other two children get even odder names. These are different names, but these are nothing like the names that Hosea gave to his children. Hosea gave names to his children that spoke volumes to the people. Hosea let his children be a part of his prophesy. His life was a prophesy. Like Ezekiel who shaved half his head and laid on his side for days and days (among many other things), Hosea’s life was a prophesy.

When we read Hosea we read of this life, we read of Hosea’s actions and read into Hosea’s prophesy through his actions. It is not like Jeremiah, Isaiah, or Micah who start with “thus says the Lord,” it is not like Elijah or Elisha who directly confronted the kings and the prophets. No, we read of Hosea’s marriage, of Gomer’s expected infidelity, and their reconciliation and we hear the prophesy of the Lord through Hosea’s life. Hosea’s life was a prophesy.

Movement 2 – The Fallen People of Israel

His life was a message to the people of Israel and Judah. Hosea was speaking primarily to the northern kingdom, Israel, but his message was also for the people of Judah. It was a message for all of the Hebrews; for all of God’s people.

Through his first child, Hosea was letting the house of Jehu, the kingdom of Israel know that God was not pleased with the massacre, violence and actions they committed. God did not look on those actions with pleasure. Through his first-born, Hosea is declaring to the house of Jehu that they were going to lose their military power and might.

Through his second child, Hosea is telling the people of Israel that God will no longer pity them when they are attacked by outside forces, when they are threatened by foreign armies. Hosea was letting the people know that they would not be saved through military might supported by God.

Through his third child, Hosea was telling the people of Israel and Judah that God had rejected them. Hosea was telling the people that they would no longer be called “my

people” by the Lord and that they were on their own. Hosea was saying that God had left and that they were on their own.

We should wonder why. We should wonder why such a rejection. We should wonder why God had turned from them. We should wonder what would have lead God to no longer show any pity to the children of Israel. We should wonder why.

Remember that Hosea’s life was a prophesy. Remember that all of Hosea’s life was a message to the people of Israel and Judah, and that message comes from his children and his wife. The prophetic actions of Hosea began with Hosea’s marriage. The Lord directed Hosea to take a whore for a wife. The Lord directed Hosea to marry a prostitute. Hosea’s life was a prophesy. His marriage was a prophesy. His marriage to an adulterous woman was a message to the people of Israel. It was a message that God was forsaken by the people. The people of Israel had forsaken the Lord, had turned to other gods, other places for faith and other places to offer their prayers. The people have become religious whores, sleeping with one god and then another. They had entered into a covenantal relationship with the Lord, similar to a marriage, but the Hebrew people were not faithful. For a time the Lord maintained the covenantal relationship with Israel, but now the people have all but left God and God would no longer support their lives as they have turned from God. Just like an adulterous spouse leaving his or her partner, Israel had left God for other religious pursuits. No longer was the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, followed. No longer was a worship fitting for the Lord offered. No longer were people considering the call of the Lord as they neglected the poor, the widows and the orphans. It was as if the nation had again gathered around the golden calf for worship and adoration. The nation had fallen to disarray; the nation had neglected their Lord. Walter Brueggemann describes it as a crisis of tradition. The people were not following the tradition of Exodus, the tradition of worship, the tradition of fidelity to God.

Hosea’s life was a prophesy of this tragedy. He took an unfaithful wife because the people were being unfaithful to God. Like the spouse that eyes the single guests at a wedding, like the spouse that has an affair after years and years of marriage, the Israelites had rejected, had neglected their Lord. The picture-perfect relationship that once was had been tarnished, had been broken.

Hosea was telling the people that they had rejected their God. Hosea was telling the people that God remembered the atrocities they had committed, that God was no longer going to have pity on them in their troubles. Hosea spoke the word of the Lord with his children, he did this with his wife, he prophesied with his life.

Movement 3 – Our Own Fall

It is also a message to us. When we read the book of Hosea, the prophesy is not just for the Israelites, but it is also for us, here, today. We can view the life of Hosea and see it as an analogy for our life as well. It is a message to us.

Let us consider if there are ways in which we have neglected the Lord. Let us consider if there are ways in which we have turned to other sources of strength, hope or love than that which is offered by our God. Have we neglected the Lord? Are there problems in our society that we turn a blind eye to? Is their suffering and inequality that occurs that we do not address? By our actions or inactions, are we neglecting the Lord?

When our children in inner-city schools are struggling, when children are not getting the books they need, the attention they need or the programs they need, then we are neglecting our Lord.

When the elderly have to decide whether they want heat for the winter, or drugs for their health, then we are neglecting the Lord.

When 18% of all children in America live in poverty we are neglecting the Lord.

When our churches push a gospel of feeling good, a message that is not meant to be threatening, then we are neglecting the Lord.

When churches teach that God wants us to grow financially instead of helping our neighbors,

when churches teach that God calls us to expand our vision for ourselves rather than giving a new vision to those who are held down then we are neglecting the Lord.

When we think about ourselves before others, we are neglecting the Lord.

When our giving decreases we are neglecting the Lord.

When we become selfish, when we make an idol out of the church or of the Bible we are neglecting the Lord.

Paying lip service to God does not patch up our relationship with God. A flashy and showy prayer without a life backing it up does not honor the Lord. Saying “Under God” in the pledge does not cover the neglect and the discounting of the poor, marginalized or the oppressed. Putting “God” on our country’s symbols does not make things right with God. The prophesy of Hosea is also a prophesy for us. We are in a relationship with the Lord, and yet we have neglected the Lord again and again.

Think of a spouse that tolerates his or her partner. The spouse is always supportive, the spouse is always looking to care for his or her partner, but the partner is often with someone else. The partner is often out late, neglecting his or her spouse. It is a couple that is fitting for *Dr. Phil*, or any other talk show. Are we that way with the Lord? Do we neglect, disrespect and turn our backs on the Lord? I think we can say there are many ways our nation is neglecting the Lord, as a nation. But one might argue that the nation is not specifically religious, so the onus is not on the nation to uphold a relationship with God. Then one could argue that our churches are neglecting the Lord. When we sit by and let atrocities happen, when we do not give a voice to those who have none, we are not staying true to the Lord. When churches focus more on the building than on the ministry of the Lord it is not being true to the Lord. When churches spend more time arguing about what hymns to sing, and how to have worship, rather than asking how to grow as disciples and how to bring others to God, then churches are neglecting the Lord.

What about as individuals? What about you and me? Are we neglecting our relationship with God? Are we being unfaithful to God? This is something that only you can answer. This is not something that I can tell you, but take a moment and ask yourself, are you completely devoted to the Lord? Ask yourself, are other things in your life occupying your time, energy and talent? Do you love the Lord your God with your heart, mind, and spirit? Do you love the Lord more than you love a sports team, more than you love comfortable living, or more than your material things? I have heard some Christians say, “I love God, and am willing to serve the Lord, but only to a point. I can only sacrifice so much.” Well, Christ sacrificed his life, and that is all he asks of you. Christ

gave his all, and that is all he wants from you. Are you devoted to the Lord, or are you held back, held down, by your own wants and desires.

Hosea's life is a prophesy for us all. Hosea's life is a message for us all. We can look and wonder if we are unfaithful as Judah, or as unfaithful as Israel. Is our church faithful or unfaithful to the Lord? Is Hosea's life a message for us?

Movement 4 – Marriage Counseling

We can go back to the Lord. We can return to God. We can make right our lives; we can repent and say we are sorry. We can return to the Lord.

You may say, "But Pastor, it says in the scripture that we will no longer be called children of God. The words of the Lord seem very final." You may say, "But Pastor, sometimes we can go so far that there is no hope for reconciliation." You may worry that we cannot return to the Lord.

I had a friend who was at one time a strong and faithful Christian. He was someone who went to church regularly, he was someone who prayed regularly, and he was someone who took the gospel seriously. My friend was devout, sincere, and dedicated his life to the Lord. Then his mother died at an early age. Just when my friend was in his 20s, his mother passed away unexpectedly. My friend was devastated. He was broken, he was in despair, and could not see any light in his life. As the grief moved from weeks to months, his life turned from Christ to the world. He began to find solace in the drink. He began to find a numbness to his pain in alcohol, and it was like his life turned 180 degrees. He no longer attended church, he no longer cared for others, but instead he began to live a reckless life, thinking only of himself, caring only for himself. One day while driving on his motorcycle (which he bought in protest and rebellion) he got into an accident. When I was visiting him in the hospital he was complaining that the Lord took his motorcycle from him. He said because he turned from God, that God was punishing him. God took his mother to test him, he failed the test and so God took his motorcycle to punish him. I looked at him and said, "I don't know why your mother died. I don't believe that God would take your mother to test you. And you lost your motorcycle because you were drinking and driving too fast. God did not punish you, you have been punishing yourself." At that moment, my friend broke down, and started to cry saying, "can I ever come back, can I ever come back?"

This is a question that we all ask when we examine our lives and realize we have been neglecting the Lord. When we consider the lives we have been living, the ways we have been destroying ourselves, we find ourselves like the repentant spouse at the front door, wondering if we will be able to return to the Lord. We find ourselves finally admitting, like the neophyte recovering addict that we have a problem and we have not been true to God. We find ourselves meekly and humbly saying we are sorry and praying that again we will receive the mercy of our Lord.

This is the hope, we can return to the Lord. We can go back, and we will be received again by the Lord. Verse 10 says, "Yet the number of the people of Israel shall be like the sand of the sea, which can be neither measured nor 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 says there is room for Israel's return. God predicts Israel's return. God says there is room for our return. God waits for our return. We can go back. We can again enter into relationship with the Lord.

If you were to read further on in Hosea you would read of Gomer leaving Hosea to be with other men. Just as was expected, Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea. In Jewish law and custom it would have been justified for Hosea to divorce Gomer and leave her. Yet Hosea takes her back. Hosea's life was a prophesy. God takes us back.

In this day and age we know that not all marriages last. We know that there are times when the hurt is too great, when the distrust grows too great, when the lack of feeling is too great and a broken marriage can never go back to the idealist hope it once held. Yet God will take us back. God will again call us children. God will again bless us and forgive us. God will take us back. We can go back to the Lord.

Hoping that the Lord will again claim us, name us and love us, we can go back. God is there, waiting, we can go back.

Movement 5 – Grace

We can find salvation through the grace of God. We can again call ourselves God's children through God's grace, and we know this because the scripture in Hosea, and because of Jesus Christ.

Think of what we gain through Christ. Jesus Christ, God's son, came here to help us with our relationship with God. Jesus came to show us a way to be with God that was surrounded with love, mercy, compassion, and peace. Jesus showed a radical way to be with God that was steeped in the Jewish tradition, and yet at the same time opened doors that many never considered could be opened. Jesus came to help us with our relationship with God, and our reaction was anger, jealousy, mistrust, fear, and hatred. Our reaction was to reject the teachings of Jesus, to reject the love of Christ, and to destroy Christ. So we, humanity, the children of God, condemned Christ to die on the Cross. We killed the very one that God sent to show us life. One would think, at that moment God would say it is over. One would think, after that act, God would be done with humanity. Can we do anything more than reject God incarnate? Can we go any farther, can we be any worse than to turn our backs and deny the very one who offers us peace and life? The day Jesus died was a dark day because of his death and because of our involvement in his death. One would think that would be the end for God's relationship with humanity. One could imagine God saying, "I will not longer have pity," and "they are not my people and I am not their God."

Yet that was not the end. That was not the final straw. That was not the closing curtain, but only intermission. Christ came back. Christ rose from the dead. We were not rejected. Through Christ, through the grace of God, we can return to the Lord and be saved. God did not reject us; God did not turn from us, but still offers us hope, and life. Through that grace, we can be saved.

Return to the Lord and fall into God's grace. Start with prayer. Start with just being with God. I know some people who turn back want to work right away. They want to keep busy, they want to get their hands dirty, that want to show God that they are now committed. It is as if we are trying to prove to God that we have changed. Start by talking to God. Start by kneeling at the foot of the cross and saying "sorry," and then just listening. Start by spending time in the Lord's presence. Start with prayer.

We cannot just go and say we are sorry and leave it at that. With every relationship we need to acknowledge where we have gone astray. We need to name the ways we have neglected the Lord. The psychologist Karl Jung talks about our shadow

side. He claims that to truly overcome our shadow side we must name it, embrace it, and own it. We cannot simply go back to God and say sorry. Just like when we wrong our neighbor, our friend or our loved one, we cannot simply say, "sorry." We must name and claim our failings, our sins and then place ourselves before the mercy of the Lord, hoping that God will take us back.

Then, when you have listened to the Lord, when you have spent time with the Lord, you will be ready to return to the work of the Lord. Then you can address the problems of the world that are grieving our God through the church. Then, washed with the grace of God, you will be able to roll up your sleeves and get to work.

And here is what will happen. Your life will become a prophesy. When you are right with God, when you have gone to the Lord with an open heart, when you have accepted the life that Christ offers to us, your relationships with others will change, and your life will become a prophesy. You will show people what the Lord desires. You will show people what grace looks like. You will show people what it means to walk with the Lord. Your life will become a prophesy.

When the church listens to God the church will become a prophesy. When the church returns to God, it will be a prophesy to the world. When the church confronts the powers that be, it does so in the name of the Lord. When the church works with those who have been forgotten, those who have been neglected, and those who have been tossed to the margins of the world, the actions of the church become a prophesy. We are telling the world that these are God's children. We are telling the world that God's love must be lived out. We will be a prophesy to the world.

Our very worship will be a prophesy. The way in which we come to the Lord, with honesty, with sincerity, with an open heart and listening ears will be a prophesy to the world. We will become like prophets proclaiming to the world, this is the relationship, this is the faith, and this is the life that God calls us to have.

Hosea's life was a prophesy. Our life can be a prophesy. Turn to the Lord. Accept the grace of the Lord. Be in a new relationship, a saving relationship with the Lord through Jesus Christ, and we will be a prophesy.

AMEN