

Hosea 3; II Tim. 3:1-9; Calling Back the Wandering Bride I. Israel's Sin II. The LORD'S Love III. Israel's Response

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how would you react to a prostitute who came to church? What if someone dressed like a sex trade worker walked through these doors? What would our first reaction be? One of disgust- or anger? Well- did you know that you are spiritual prostitute by nature? A spiritual adulterer? Today we begin our summer series on the last 12 books of the OT- sometimes called the Minor Prophets due to their short length. Each week we will focus on one of these prophets- giving a bird's eye view of the book as a whole but also focussing on a theme verse of that book. Today we start with the prophet Hosea. Now the book of Hosea and the life of Hosea are really intertwined. Hosea ministered around 700 BC- shortly before the Assyrians came and deported the majority of the Northern Tribes. It was a time of great plenty and peace on the outside- but on the inside the Northern Israelites were filled with corruption and decay. As you know, Hosea was told to marry a prostitute named Gomer. In this divine illustration, Hosea's actions will come to represent the LORD and Gomer's actions represent the sins of God's people. In this way- we are all by nature prostitutes- we are spiritual adulterous when we worship and go after false gods and forbidden pleasures. So today we consider this theme: the LORD calls back the wandering bride by redeeming her from slavery.

I. Israel's Sin

In our first point we will see how Gomer- Hosea's wife- represents Israel and their sin. Gomer is a picture of what was going on in the nation of Israel- and the situation in Israel is very bleak, spiritually speaking. In 3:1 we are introduced to this woman who is loved by another man and is an adulterous. She is identified as a "Naaph" which is an adulterous person- one who breaks her vow of marriage. Now marriage is a vow- a covenant and promise made between a husband and wife. They agree to live with each other- to be committed to each other- until death parts them. But this woman- Gomer- has broken this vow- considered her promise insignificant- and she has gone her own way. She returned to the life of a prostitute which she was before her marriage. Like a pig returning to wallow in the mud. But not only has she refused to live with her loving husband, she has gone out to play the adulterous. She loved foreign men- she lived with men who

were not her husband. She pretended to be married to many others- enjoying the fruit of marriage outside the bounds the covenant of matrimony. Now the word here used to describe Gomer also has a spiritual component as well. To commit adultery is connected to idolatrous worship as we will see. I mean this is a socking picture- the wife of a well known and respected prophet- goes and flaunts her body and gives herself to anyone who is interested! This is scandalous! She has become the forbidden and rebellious woman of Prov. 7- the adulterous with her wonton eyes and smooth words- but whose path leads to death! Added to this, she is as v. 3 says- playing the part of the whore. Now this means that she was selling her body for money- she would give herself to others- to pleasure them physically- in order to make a living. Now remember that Gomer is a picture of the Israelites. As Ex. 34:15 says, you shall not make a covenant with the people of the land- or whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods- you shall not worship the false deities of the Canaanite nations- nor shall you participate in their pagan rituals. In todays language it would be like a covenant child raised in a faithful church- choosing to become a Muslim- to serve the god of the Islamic faith. The Israelites as a whole had- as v. 1 concludes by saying- gone after the pleasures of this world and she was happy to engage in what is called cult prostitution. They have done what the LORD warned against- forbid them to do. They had turned to other gods- the Baal and the Ashorah. Loving their raisin cakes v.1 ends in saying- or also translated as flasks of wine. These raising cakes were associated with the temple of Ashorah and Baal- where cult prostitutes would perform various sexual activities for the price of a raisin cake or the eating of that cake- thinking that this raisin cake would secure pregnancy or prosperity. So Israel loved the food and drink of these perverse actions. This brings to mind what happened in Israel while Moses was receiving the commandments in Ex. 32. The Israelite made their golden calf and then got up to play- to carouse- while sexual connotations. Think of all that Hosea had done for his wife! Think of all that the LORD had done for Israel! He had saved her from slavery once already! Lead her from Egypt on eagle's wings and brought her to the promised land. And this is how Israel responds- by worshipping the false gods of the nations! Jeremiah 3 says that Israel is the adulterous one- faithless in her treachery.

What Gomer has done in specific- and the Israelites in general- is to embrace the spirit of the godlessness. They have loved pleasure and money; they are unholy and full of deceit- willing to break their vows and transgress the covenant for the sake of little pleasure and to satisfy a physical desire as we read from II Tim. 3. This is what we see around us in our world- and by nature this would live in our own hearts as well. We too are prone to wander- prove to leave the God who loves us! Idolatry is really repulsive! Who would want to marry a rebellious girl like this- like us? Whenever we love the things of this world- whenever we serve created things- when we set our heart on earthly pleasures- we too forsake our first love! We are running away from the One who has given us so much! James 4 says that friendship- loving the world is spiritual adultery- hostility towards God!

II. The LORD'S Love

But the Love of God is very evident as we consider the commands given to Hosea. How does this loving husband respond when his wife forsakes him and dives into sexual iniquity? Well, Hosea at the LORD command, goes to her and loves her again! As v. 1 begins- Go again and love this woman! The command is to love- an action of commitment! Why must Hosea love his estranged and rebellious wife? Because the LORD loves His own, rebellious people! This is a gentle reminder for humility- there is nothing in Israel- and nothing in us for that matter- that would make us worthy of receiving God's love! The fact is- God simply loved us- He set His heart on His people- even though they were rebellious, polluted and prone to stray! So Hosea is told to love- even as the Lord loves the children of Israel! For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son- greater love has no man this, that He lay down His life for His friend! God is love- and in that love He has chosen to redeem and save a people for Himself! And the manner in which God shows His love is by redeeming His people- just as Hosea was now instructed to redeem His bride. It might seem strange to our ears- but in v. 2 Hosea goes and purchases his wife. Why would Hosea need to purchase his wife? She was already his wife, right? Well, evidently because of Gomer's wicked actions she had fallen in with a bad crowd. No longer could she simply sell her body in adultery- she became so used and abused that she was forced into slavery. Whoever commits sin is really enslaved by it. She was on the auction block- she was going to be sold

as a slave to anyone who would have her. Her lovers had forsaken her- now she was penniless and destitute- and her body was being sold to cover her expenses. And note how much is paid for her in v. 2. Only 15 shekels of silver and some barley. Now a normal, female slave or bondservant was worth 30 shekels in Lev. 27. So here Gomer is worth half of that. Evidently, she is so used, abused and polluted that she is worth little to others. No one wants her- she is dead in her sin and trespasses- good for nothing. But someone is willing to buy her- her own husband! Although Gomer has been caught in this life of sin- now bankrupt and impoverished- she is on the road to slavery- there is one who rescues her! Here again we find a picture of LORD who pursues and purchases His people! We are reminded of our God's great love and steadfast mercy! Although we may stray, it is God's hold on us that keeps us safe! We may wander, but in His love He will keep us! He will rescue us- having purchased us- redeemed us by paying for us to keep us out of slavery! As Hosea did- our God woos us- He speaks tenderly to us in His love and carries us home! As the poem by Thompson illustrates- Our God is like the hound of heaven! He will continue to pursue until He gets His desire! As Hosea 11:8 puts it, How can I give you up? My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger, for I am God- and I will not come in wrath! Having received this love, our God will take care of His bride. And afterwards, they shall return and David will be their king as v. 5 continues. Hosea is given a glimpse of the future kingdom to come- one over which David will rule. David was the last king of the unified nation- and this nation of Israel will be made one again. There will be a reunification and restoration. There will be one nation under God lead by God's anointed King! In the latter days- in the end times- there will be a holy nation- a united bride gathered by David's Son. It is interesting to note that Hosea's name is built on the same root for Joshua- the LORD Saves. This name translates into Jesus in the NT- who is the Lord's anointed king! You see, it is Jesus who will be sent in the Father's love. Jesus who will redeem His people from slavery and ransom His bride! The Good Shepherd will come- to seek and find the wandering sheep- to gather the ones that stray- and He will bring them to be with Himself for all eternity! We should rightly be shocked- marvel at this wonderful truth. Our God loved us when we were altogether loveless-

undeserving of His affection. And yet Jesus came to save us- to make us His bride- to wash us, purify us, and welcome us into His presence forever!

III. Israel's Response

Well now that we have considered the love of the LORD made evident in the actions of Hosea, what remains is the calling that Israel receives. How was Gomer, this adulterous wife, to act now that she had been purchased by her loving husband? Well, as Hosea said to his redeemed wife in v. 3, you must live with me- you must dwell as mine for many days. You can no longer play the whore, no longer living like an adulterer- no longer a slave. But you shall live with me! You shall be as one of my family- you shall live in my house with me. Having been redeemed and restored- this ransomed bride was to live like she had been ransomed and restored. She is not to go back to her old life. The same is to apply to the people of Israel in v. 5- they are to return and seek the LORD! Having been redeemed by the Son of King David, they are to live in covenant obedience! God's people who have been ransomed by the blood of the Lamb are now called to live in thankful obedience! We will respond to His saving work with acts of gratitude- living by repentance and faith! Return to me as Zech. 1 says, and I will return to you. So the consequence of being bought is that we will live with our husband! Belonging to Him in body and soul means that we will live for Him and with Him! That is how God's people will respond when they are purchased by their loving Lord and husband.

To conclude, Hosea and Gomer give us a striking contract and reminder of why we need to be redeemed. In Rev. 21 we read of the church which is prepared for marriage as the bride of Christ. We are called the wife of the Lamb- and He has made us beautiful- having washed us and purified us with His Spirit and Word as Eph. 5 states. This cleansing is all the more striking when we remember that we are adulterous and rebellious by nature as we saw in Hosea 3. II Cor. 11 says that we are betrothed to one husband- presented to Christ! The LORD calls back the wandering bride by redeeming her from slavery. Let's close with the words of Isaiah 62:5- as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you! Praise God that we are chosen, loved, redeemed and purchased by the blessed groom- our Lord Jesus Christ!