

Prestonwood Connection

#10 Doing Life...Together

Hosea & Gomer / Runaway Bride

Hosea 1:2

November 16, 2005 • Dr. David McKinley

[Dr. McKinley, message, *Hosea & Gomer / Runaway Bride*]

Well, I love to think about grace, because grace reminds me of gifts. What we receive and what we receive by grace we receive as a gift in life. It's been well said, that justice is getting just exactly what you deserve in life. Mercy is not getting what you deserve in life, but grace is getting what you don't deserve in life and in life we look and see the grace of God that touches us time and time again and we just have to say God Your grace is amazing and I have to say to you tonight that one of the great gifts that I have enjoyed and benefited from greatly in my life has been the gift and the talent and the heart and the passion for worship that God has given to Rick Briscoe and to a team who lead us every Wednesday night and I think you need to help me to say thank you to them [applause] for a great job that they do a..., time and time again. [applause] And then every week when you get here you receive a worship guide and that worship guide has in it a prayer request and a prayer card and a..., just several other things that are a part of this and we have a team of people, Bob and Joan Frost and a..., Barbara and John and Clarise; all of these who work every week to a..., prepare for the Wednesday evening service, come up and spend all Wednesday where with us. Would you just say thank you to them tonight for what they do to help us and a..., [applause] know that we're grateful for each and every one of their lives. And then there's the grace a..., of God and that you've come to be here tonight, to be a part of this evening and I'm thankful that you're here and God has given us His Word and I'm looking forward to wrapping up something that's been a lot of fun this fall and that's talking about, *Doing Life Together*, that's been our series that we've looked at all through the fall.

Now it was in 1999 that Julia Roberts played the role of the loveable Maggie who could never find the courage to stay at the altar. The name of the movie was *Runaway Bride* and a..., whether you've seen the movie or not, the a..., humor of the movie was the fact that she always would come to the church in a beautiful wedding gown but underneath that wedding gown Maggie always had on a pair of running shoes. Heh! And just at the right time and just at the right moment when it would seem as though the wedding was going to be a... effective, as though the vows were going to be shared Maggie would run and all that you would have would just be the train of...of her veil running and blowing in the wind and she was runnin down the street and she'd done it time and time again. Well, it made for a rather

enjoyable romantic comedy.

But in May of this year another bride by the name of Jennifer Wilbanks went out for a run and when she went out for a run she simply did not come back. Well, what began as a run without un...without certainty as to where she was and what she was doing created a mystery for her groom and her family and over a period of days her anguished disappearance created a stir for an entire community throughout the part of Georgia that she lived in. Of course there was a massive search to try to find this *Runaway Bride* and no one really knew what happened, there was great speculation, there was no rhyme or reason to it and as it turned out on the Saturday morning that would have been her wedding day Jennifer Wilbanks made a phone call to her family from a pay phone in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At that time, that day, that hour of her wedding when 600 guests were supposed to gather and 14 bridesmaids and 14 groomsmen were all to have been there, she called and said that she had been abducted by some people in a blue van and that she needed someone to come and to get her. Well, I think you know the rest of the story, Jennifer Wilbanks, had not in fact, been abducted, she made up this incredible story, she faked the entire ode...ordeal and then in the end she brought an incredible amount of shame, disgrace and debt to her family. She was a runaway bride and till this day many people are still trying to figure out what was that all about. It cost her community over \$40,000, in tax payer dollars to try to create this manhunt, this massive search that was under way and so ultimately what it's pra...played out to be before our eyes was a form of a tragic love story.

Well, tonight we're gonna talk about a *Runaway Bride* and we read the account in the book of Hosea. It's one of the most powerful, it's one of the a..., most painful, it's one of the most dramatic of all of the books in the Bible. The book of Hosea is the 1st of the minor prophets and whenever we call them minor prophets, we're not saying that they are minor in message, they have a major message they're just minor in size. When you look at a book like Asi...Isaiah that has 66 chapters or a book like Jeremiah that has over 40 chapters you find that the rest of these prophecies were much smaller, that is in length and in dynamics, but not in any way lesser in the impact of their message. And so when we read the book of Hosea, we read a story that is a tragic love story. The backdrop of the prophet Hosea is actually found in the book of 2nd Kings, chapters 15 through 17 and let me just remind you that what you have in the Old Testament is you have historical books, the Kings, the Chronicles, then you have the poetical books which are Psalms, Proverbs, all of those and then you have the prophets. But the prophets really lay over in time the historical books of the Old Testament and so it was in that time period in 2nd Kings when it was in the nation of Israel that everyone was just living life the way the wanted to live it. There were days of prosperity, they were day of...of a..., peace and people were doing everything imaginable, except for one thing, paying attention to God. Most people didn't have any room for God in their life. They were happy to just live their lives. Now I didn't mean to say that there weren't people who pra...didn't practice a religion, they were religious, but their religion was, as though it were,

something that they did that did not have any depth to it. They had a spirituality, but it was an empty spirituality and so they were doing all these things in form, but they were living their lives apart from pl...God's plan and God's purpose and so it is in the backdrop of this kind of happy go lucky prosperous time that Hosea steps on the scene and God has given him a message for the nation of Israel and it's not exactly a feel-good message. It's a message that has weight, it's a message that has substance, it's a message that isn't just religious and feel-good, it's a message that calls for judgment and for repentance. And so in order to get the attention of a nation God called this man Hosea to do something very difficult and very painful and the instruction that God gave him is the what I want us to read in Hosea chapter 1, verse 1:

The word of the LORD came to Hosea the son of Beerī, 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.

That's how we know where to pinpoint this prophecy in time frame. He was a contemporary of Amos, of Micah and of Isaiah. But we pinpoint by seeing these kings and we go back to the book of Kings, but here's what the Lord says:

²*When the LORD began to speak by Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea:...*

Are you ready for this?

...“Go take yourself a wife of har...harlotry And children of harlotry, For the land has committed great harlotry By departing from the LORD.” ³*So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim and she conceived and bore him a son.*

Well I can only tell you that this woman Gomer had the right name, that is at least the first two letters, "GO" heh, cause that's about all she did after they got married, she was on the go, she was on the make, she was on the move. This was a woman who, though she was beautiful, though she was a woman that any man would have been attracted to, she was a woman who was attracted herself to many men and the Bible says that God called this man and called this man to do something that is really shocking for us to read, but God did it in order to try to capture the attention of a nation and the drama that played out in the heart of Hosea was as though it were, the drama that was playing out between God and His people in the nation of Israel. We read this passage of Scripture, we can't help but say why, why did God do this? Why would God ever allow anything like this? And while I don't know all of the particulars in the wisdom and the providence of God there is something that I know very specifically tonight and that is that the Word of God makes it clear that in the Old Testament God presented the relationship that He had with that nation of Israel like that of a bride and of a groom. Just listen to these words in Isaiah 54 and verse 5:

For your Maker is your husband, The LORD of hosts is His name; And your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel; He is called the God of the whole

earth.

And so here clearly God says I am to the nation of Israel, a Husband. But not only do we find that true of the Old Testament relationship between God and the nation of Israel we find that true of the New Testament and our relationship with God as members of His church. We are the bride of Christ. Look at this passage from I...from Ephesians: [5:31-32]

³¹*"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother..."*

That's where we started this whole series, looking in the book of Genesis and learning about God's plan for marriage.

"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, the two shall become one flesh." ³²And this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

In the Old Testament it was God and Israel. In the New Testament it is Christ and the church and God intends for marriage to be a picture of the fidelity, of the beauty, of the unity and the security that we are intended to have in a relationship with God. So in the book of Hosea God says I want you to marry a woman, but I'm gonna tell you at the outset that this woman is not gonna be faithful to you and so it is that Hosea married Gomer and she became a shameful *Runaway Bride*. And we begin to see the progression as it unfolds here in the remainder of chapter 1, the Bible tells us that there were 3 children born to Hosea and to Gomer. The first one was a child, the Bible tells us in verse 4 by the...by the name of Jezreel, and Jezreel was born and his name literally meant judgment. God was going to give a statement of judgment. And then the Bible goes on to tell us here in verse 6 that there was another child born by the day...by the name of LoRuhamah...LoRuhamah. Now that doesn't mean anything in the world to you, but the name LoRuhamah actually means no mercy, that God has determined that His people have crossed the line and there's not going to be mercy. And then the Bible says that there was a 3rd child born and that child's name in verse 9 was LoAmmi. And the word LoAmmi means, not My people. Are you starting to get the picture of what's happening between Hosea and Gomer? Children are being born, but there's a dispute about who these children really are. She's havin babies, but we're not even sure they're really their babies and clearly by the time they get to the last one it's someone else's child. Three children born into a preacher's home and a wife who's out moving around through the community. Can you imagine the shame, can you imagine the stir, can you imagine the heartbreak? Well, that's exactly the picture that God is unfolding before the eyes of the people of Israel because He wanted them to see and to know and to understand where He was and what He saw happening in their hearts and in their lives. And just to underscore that lets read beginning in chapter 2, verse 2:

²*"Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; For she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, And her adulteries from between her breasts; ³Lest I strip her naked And expose*

her, as in the day she was born, And make her like a wilderness, And set her like a dry land, And slay her with thirst. ⁴I will not have mercy on her children, For they are the children of harlotry. ⁵For their mother has played the harlot; She who conceived them has behaved shamefully, For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, Who will give me my bread and my water, and My wool and my linen, My oil and my drink.'"

Boy that's not a very pretty picture is it? That's not a very happy message is it? Do you understand that the audience wasn't exactly happy to hear what Hosea had to say? Because they saw it in his life, they saw it with his wife and he said this is what God has to say to the nation of Israel. But I want you to go on down and see one other passage and that is beginning in verse 19, because here the Word of the Lord is spoken again, and God says of His people Israel:

¹⁹"I will betroth you to Me forever; Yes, I will betroth you to Me In righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy; ²⁰I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, And you shall know the LORD, ²¹And it will come to pass in that day That I will answer." Says the LORD; "I will answer the heavens, And they shall answer the earth. ²²And the earth shall answer With grain, And new wine, And with oil; And I will answer Jezreel. ²³And then I will sow her Myself...for Myself in the earth, And I will have mercy on her who has not obtained mercy; And I will say to those who are not My people, 'You are My people!' For they shall say, 'You are my God!'"

God says I'm unfolding all of this because I want you to know that there's going to be a day where restoration can come again. Now I know all of this is a lot of history and a lot of background and a lot of text, but you have to understand the background of this relationship. There's a twofold story being told here. There's the real live action relationship of what's happening between Hosea and Gomer and then there is the real and the significant thing that is happening between God and the nation of Israel.

But, here's what it all comes down to God wants us to **GET THIS PICTURE** and it is this, that God sees the harlotry in every human heart. That's something we need to understand tonight. That's really what's unfolding here between the prophet and the nation and his marriage, but it's the very thing that God wants us to see about ourselves tonight, that every one of us has a tendency to have a spirit of wandering away from God. And can I tell you that the most destructive thing that happens in every human relationship is when there're people who try to have relationships with others, in particular a marriage relationship and has chosen to do so by wandering away from God, because there is sure conflict, there is sure destru...destruction and there is sure injury. Hosea becomes a broken man with a broken heart proclaiming a broken message to the people and yet God wants us to see these things and to understand that both physically when adultery occurs in a relationship and spiritually when adultery occurs in our relationship with God that there are commonalities and similarities and we've gotta get the picture that there is a proneness in us to wander. Let me just mention to you some parallels between spiritual and physical adultery. I found these in the Living Bible, I thought they were very

helpful.

BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ADULTERY ARE AGAINST GOD'S LAW. That's something we have to say and see at the outset, that while they are being portrayed here for us these are things that are against God's law.

2nd BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ADULTERY BEGIN WITH DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISSATISFACTION EITHER REAL OR IMAGINED IN AN ALREADY EXISTING RELATIONSHIP. Sometimes we wander away from God because we don't believe that God is going to provide the best and going to satisfy us in life and so we cause a lot of grief and heartache and trouble because of our own wandering and our own pursuit to satisfy ourselves apart from God.

#3 BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ADULTERY BEGIN WITH DIVERTING AFFECTION FORM ONE OBJECT OF DEVOTION TO ANOTHER.

And then **BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ADULTERY INVOLVE A PROCESS OF DETERIORATION THAT IS NOT USUALLY JUST AN IMPULSIVE DECISION, IT HAPPENS OVER TIME.** And there's a progression with Hosea and Gomer, there's a progression between God and Israel, there's a progression with you and me in our relationship with God and those same tendencies in our relationships with others if we do not pay attention.

And then finally **BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL ADULTERY INVOLVE THE CREATION OF A FANTASY ABOUT WHAT THE NEW OBJECT OF LOVE CAN DO FOR YOU.** Gomer thought I'm gonna go out here and have a good life and I'll be more fulfilled with many men instead of just one. But it was a fantasy that we talked about last week that is anything but a fantastic adventure. I say all of this to say that God simply wants us to get the picture and the picture is, is as much as we all want to have relationships in life, until we are right in our relationship with God no other relationship is gonna be right, because there is a tendency for all of us to wander, for all of us to be unfaithful. [cell phone rings] Just tell em we'll call em back in a few minutes, okay? [pause for congregation laughter] The songwriter put it this way: [Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing, verse 3]

*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it.
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here's my heart Lord, take and seal it;
Seal it for Your courts above.*

So get the picture. Do you have the picture. Say we got it! [We got it!] Okay good, I wanna know that you got it.

Now the next thing that we gotta do is not only get the picture, but then we ha...we've got to **HEAR THE MESSAGE.** And we don't always hear things. Now we heard a telephone ring just a minute ago right? We all heard that. Somebody's royally embarrassed, I know I'm making much of this but...but we gotta be sure that we're hearing the right thing at the right time in life.

I heard about an older couple, they were getting well on up in years, they'd been married a very long time and one beautiful evening they were sitting on a porch and the sun was setting and it was just one of those moments and the old husband wanted to capture the moment with his wife of so many years and he just reached over and put his hand on hers and patted her on the hand and he said, "Honey, I'm sure proud of you." She said, "Huh, what'd you say?" And he kinda about half smiled and he said, "Honey, I'm sure proud of you." She said, "Speak up I can't hear what you're sayin." He said, "Honey, I'm proud of you." She said, "And I'm tired of you too." [congregation laughter] Well, sometimes we don't hear the message. Well, tonight I wanna be sure that we not only get the picture but that we hear the message. And the message of God from the book of Hosea is a very specific message and here it is, you ready for it? While we may be unfaithful, God is faithful, but here's the rest of it and moves to bring judgment on sin. While we may be unfaithful God is faithful and will always move to bring judgment on sin. Judgment is the result of sin and justice and judgment is the necessary consequence of sin in all of our lives. God wants us to understand that when we are prone to wander, whether it is within a relationship in which we've made a commitment before God, like marriage, or whether it's in our relationships with Him that God is going to move in and move around and begin to work with us in order to try to bring us away from that sin and to understand it's consequence and to bring us back into a right relationship with Him. Now there were many steps that brought about this sense of wandering in the hearts of Israel and certainly in the life of Gomer, this woman. If I could just give you a...a chart it would include:

INGRATITUDE and
 IDOLITRY and
 INFIDELITY and
 INJUSTICE

All of these things are traced both in the life of Gomer and in the...in the...and in the nation of Israel. That all of these things were unfolding and a spirit of ingratitude and a spirit of idolatry and infidelity, injustice, all of these things were a part of the things that began to bring this word of judgment from God. And God wanted them to hear and to understand the message that there is a consequence when we break the law of God. Did you know that every sin breaks God's law? But there's something else you need to know, every sin breaks God's heart. And if the book of Hosea teaches us anything it is not only that sin brings the...it's consequence because it brings us under the law of God, it is that sin breaks the heart of God because He loves us. And there's this collision as though there were, throughout the book of...of Hosea. On the one hand there's this expression of God's judgment and His justice, but on the other hand the expression of His love and of His mercy and here God is saying to the people, I love you, I want to be your Husband, I want to be in relationship with you, but I love you too much to just let you live any way. You know the Bible teaches us that truth don't you? In the book of Hebrews, chapter 12, you might wanna write this down and look it up when you get home this evening. In the book of Hebrews, chapter 12, the Bible

tells us that because God loves us He chastens us. Listen to these words:
[verse 5-7]

⁵Have you forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you're rebuked by Him; ⁶For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And He scourges every son whom He receives." ⁷If you endure chastening, God deals with you as sons; for what son is there who the father does not chasten?

God disciplines us, God brings consequence in our lives and God is faithful even when we are unfaithful to move and to work to try to bring us back into rightness and right relationship with Him. I'm convinced He tries to do this time and time again to bring us back into right relationship with those with whom we've had conflict and brokenness in our relationships and sometimes we have uncomfortable circumstances and conflicts and experiences, because God is agitating us to try to bring us back into relationship with Him and trying to remind us you need to get right with this person in life.

That takes me to the 3rd and the final thing that I want us to see tonight and that is not only that we need to get the picture, that God knows that there's harlotry in every heart and not only do we need to hear the message that while we may be unfaithful, God is faithful and He will bring judgment. But the 3rd picture that I want us to get and the 3rd point that I want us to hear is that ex...we need to **EXPERIENCE THE TRUTH** and that is that God says **BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS ARE RECONCILABLE THROUGH HIS MERCY, HIS LOVE AND HIS GRACE**. Now that's the part of the message we need to hear tonight isn't it? Now we needed to hear the other part, we don't like to hear the other part, it's not as palatable, it's not as enjoyable, but we never fully understand the wonder of the grace of God that amazes us until we understand the reality of the problem that is within us and so here we hear in the book of Hosea that God wants us to experience the truth and the truth is that broken relationships are reconcilable through His mercy, His love and His grace. So let's go to the last chapter of the book of Hosea, chapter 14 and here at the end of the book you hear the voice of God calling. You can only imagine in the life of Hosea how many times He called out Gomer, he called her name. I can only imagine that some times she may have been leaving the house and he was calling and saying Gomer please come back, please come home, but Gomer was going away. But here we have the voice of God speaking to His people and listen to what God says in chapter 14: [verse 1-2]

¹O Israel, return to the LORD your God, For you have stumbled because of your iniquity; ²Take words with you, And return to the LORD.

God is calling out to His people and saying listen, there is brokenness in your relationship with Me and there may be brokenness in your relationship with others, but God wants us to know that we can mend brokenness when we return to Him and respond to His voice calling us again to mercy, to love and to grace. Down in verse 4 of this 14th chapter God says:

⁴"I will heal your backsliding, and I will love them freely, For My anger has turned away from him, ⁵And I will be like to him like the dew to Israel; And shall grow like a lily, And lengthen his roots like Lebanon."

Literally the Bible says, we can have springtime again. There can be a renewal, there can be a reconciliation, there can be a new beginning in a relationship with God and for all of things that we've looked at and all the things that we've talked about in this series, all the different dynamics that play out in relationships for married couples and single adults and friendships and all these family relationships we've talked about God wants us to hear and to know that when there has been injury and when there has been stain and when there has been brokenness that by His mercy and by His love and by His grace there can be a restoration. What must we remember when relationships are broken? What did God want Israel to remember when relationships are broken? What did God want Hosea and Gomer to understand when relationships are broken? The things that I believe He wants us to walk away with tonight and the first and the most important is a **WORD OF REASSURANCE** and it is the reassurance that **GOD IS FAITHFUL**, God is faithful. When others fail us, when others hurt us, when others reject us, when others disappoint us, God faithfulness endures and I want every one in this room tonight to know that wherever you may be in relationship with someone else there is a relationship with God where God will always be faithful to you. God will not overlook you and there is powerful imagery in the assurance that God cares for you. Look at chapter 14 in verse 3, the Bible says at the end of verse 3:

"...For in You the fatherless finds mercy."

Look again in chapter 14 and down in verse 7, the Bible says that:

"Those who dwell under his shadow shall return;..."

These are word pictures talking about the fact that God covers and God shelters and God cares for those who have been hurt, but who come to Him again. When I read that that you will be in the shadow of his return, I'm reminded of Psalm 91 that says:

He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

So whoever you are and whatever you've experiences and whatever pain may have come into your life through a broken relationship with someone else, I want you to remember that for everyone who has failed you and been unfaithful to you God will always be faithful and you can trust Him. In fact did you know that's how the book closes? Chapter 14 in verse 9 says this:

Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. That the ways of the Lord are right; And the righteous walk in them, But transgressors stumble in them.

The Bible says that when you walk in with the Lord, when you come to the Lord, that you're gonna prove time and time again, even when you've been hurt, even when others have done you wrong, when you come and you do what is right by God, God's faithfulness will cover you, strengthen you and restore you. God will always be faithful to you. That is a word of reassurance.

But there's another word that we need to hear tonight and that is a **WORD OF RESTORATION** and that is that we need to remember that the book of Hosea tells us that forgiveness is possible. Some of you tonight may have fallen, you may have been unfaithful in a relationship and you need to be forgiven. I realize this is very straight talk in a large group of people, but it's straight talk from the Word of God and the Word of God reminds us again and again that whoever we are and whatever we've done that God extends His forgiveness to us. Now I do not want to say for a moment that you can do whatever you wanna do and just say well God forgive it and cover it up. God doesn't do that, there are consequences for sin. And God sometimes allows a consequence. Sometimes when a person is unfaithful to their marriage the consequence is they loose the marriage and it is never again restored. Though we love to talk about restoration and reconciliation and we pray for that and we work for that and we fight for that there is a consequence that can come in your life that is painful. But I say that to you on the other hand to say that you can still be right with God and you can come again and begin to walk in His way. How do I come back to God when I have wandered away? Well, look at what the Bible tells us in chapter 14, verse 2:

Take words with you, And return to the LORD. Say to Him, "Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips."

You means words, I need to come and bring words and I can be forgiven? Well, that's exactly what the Bible tells us in 1st John chapter 1 in verse 9, listen to this passage of Scripture:

If we confess our sins,...

Confess means to say the same thing as God says.

If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

There is hope, there is help for those who have fallen and God calls us again and again back to Himself. How do I come back to God? How can I have a new beginning? Confess your sins, repent of your sin and call upon the name of the Lord who is faithful to forgive. So there's a word of reassurance that God is faithful and if you have been injured by someone who has injured you, you turn to the Lord and God's going to cover you and care for you. There's a word of restoration and that is that forgiveness is possible and God offers us the ability to be right and to be made whole with Him.

But then there's a final thing and that is **REDEMPTION** and that is that there is a grace of God that is indescribable. I said it at the beginning justice is giving people what they do deserve, mercy is not giving them what they deserve, but grace is giving them what they don't deserve. You know when Jennifer Wilbanks came back home Jennifer Wilbanks came home to a debt, a debt that her family had to pay to the community for all that had been done. It was a debt that required cost and payment, but here is the best news of all that I can tell you about tonight and that is that God has provided the payment of the debt of all sin that in the person of His Son Jesus Christ every one of us might be forgiven. He has bought us with a price that we might be His and His alone.

I've skipped over something very important in the book of Hosea and that's Hosea chapter 3. In reality chapters 1 through 3 talk about Hosea and Gomer and then beginning in chapter 4 all the way to the end of the book it just talks about the nation of Israel. But in chapter 3 God told Hosea to do something that may have been even more surprising than what he asked him to do at the beginning of the book. At the beginning of the book He said I want you to go marry a woman. Hey God, like that idea, she's a pretty good looking woman, I'm gonna marry her, I like that. Oh, but let me tell you something, she's not gonna be faithful. What's that God? What are you askin me to do? It sounded crazy. Well, if you think that was crazy, listen to this: [verse 1-3]

¹The Word of the LORD came to me saying..

In chapter 3:

...“Go again and love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, and just like the love of the Lord for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans.” ²So I bought her for myself with fifteen shekels of silver, and one and one-half homers of barley. ³And I said to her, “You shall stay with me many days, you shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man—so too, will I be toward you.”

Are you getting this picture? He went and found her at the end of her harlotry, when she was living in debt and living with men who could not care for her and he paid the price of a slave and bought his wife and brought her back home. Ladies and gentlemen, that is grace. If you've never in your life known what grace is, that is grace. Did Gomer deserve anything like this? Absolutely not! I actually started to call this message *Gone With The Wind*, because there's this incredible scene at the end of the movie *Gone With The Wind*, when Rhett and Scarlet meet at the bottom of the staircase and Scarlet is pouring out her heart begging Rhett to take her back and he looked at her and he said something to her [congregation laughter] and I'm glad you all know what it is, [more laughter] because I gotta tell you if I were Hosea that's exactly what I'd a wanted to said to Gomer. [more laughter] But you know what he did? He said Gomer, I've paid the price, you're set free and I want you to come

back home and I'm gonna love you. That is grace. I love the way that Ray Stedman said it, he said:

"The book of Hosea is the story of the Bible isn't it? In Bethlehem God entered the slave market of the whole human race and was putting itself up for auction, prostituting itself in its humanity to a cheapened life. But on the cross the Lord Jesus paid the price, the full price for our freedom and bought us back. This is the story of God's love and God's heart. His love...loving desire is to make His people the full person He intended them to be."

The only way we can be the people God wants us to be in any human relationship is by letting that relationship be touched by the grace, the mercy and the love of God. And how I thank God for a God who has given us the ability to do life together, not by doing our best or doing it our way, but by doing it with Him, because it is His love and it is His grace that is so amazing. George Matheson the hymn writer said it this way, I think you'll hear it afresh and anew.

*O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths that flow
May richer, fuller be.*

That's the Christian life. I am so grateful for what God has done for me in grace that I live every day of my life as an expression of gratitude to God and every relationship that I'm in I embrace that relationship with gratitude and mercy and love and grace because of the wonder of all that God has done for me. Let me ask you somethin tonight are you harboring a root of bitterness against somebody in your life? Is there somebody who's hurt you? Is there someone who you are struggling to get along with in life? I wanna ask you tonight if God's grace is so great to you, if you will drink of His grace, see that...but that He will give you the grace to be set free from the slavery of bitterness and to live your life in forgiveness and freedom and love. We have to be set free if we're going to be able to live out the life that God intends for us and my prayer is that you will know the truth...the truth about all of these things we've talked about in relationships and that the truth will set you free.