

Ancient Cliff Notes

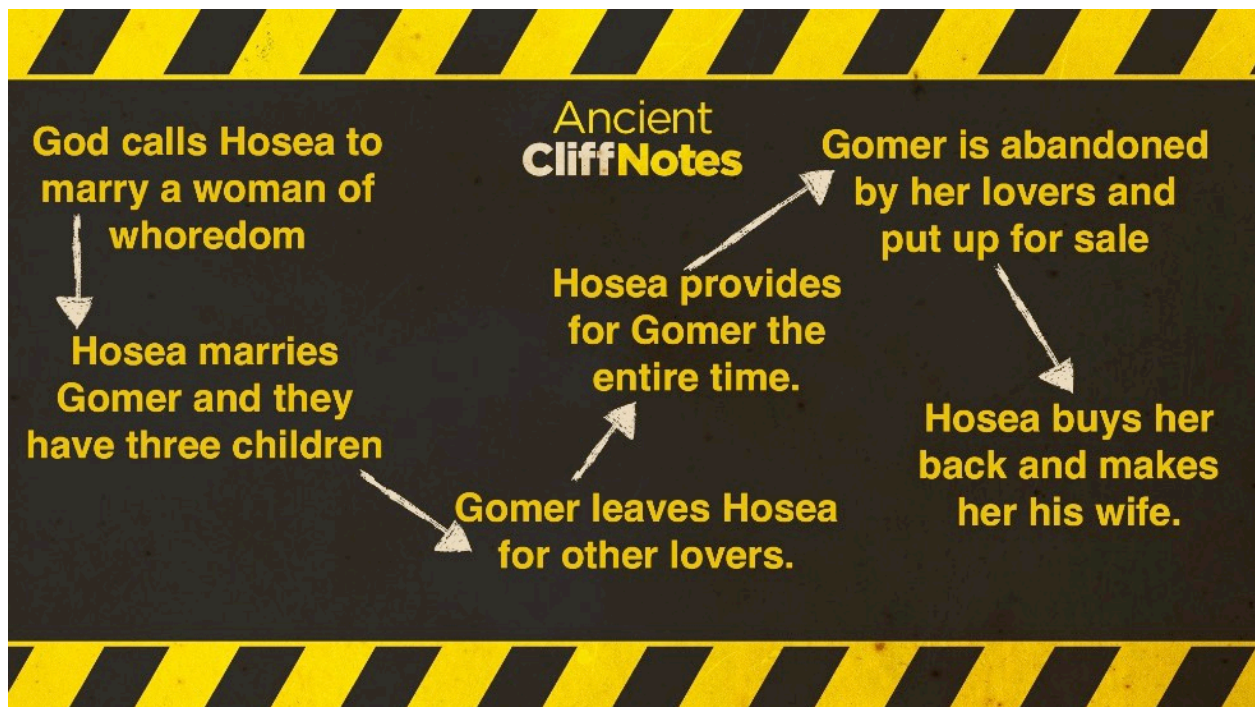
Hosea

September 16, 2018

Courage Church, Detroit, MI.

scriptures: Hosea 1, 2, 3, 6, 11. Exodus 20, Jeremiah 3:8, Matthew 9:12-13, Exodus 32, Exodus 34, Isaiah 57:15

Today is going to be different. We had originally planned to do Jonah today because this Tuesday night begins Yom Kippur, and there is a really cool connection to the book of Jonah and the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur... but for the flow of the next three weeks and the concept that we want to convey through that, I think that it makes sense to start with Hosea.



So it will be Hosea today, then tentatively next week Ruth and the 30th Jonah. All absolutely incredible, yet very short books of the Bible.

The book of Hosea being the most complex, and by far the longest of the three books we will look at. It is 14 chapters long, and it is the first book in the Bible considered to be a “minor prophet”

And the book is filled with prophecies that we will barely be able to scratch the surface on... describing Israel’s unfaithfulness to God and pointing to the fact that they were about to be taken over by Assyria. The same Assyria that Jonah was called by God to go and preach to its capital city, Nineveh. They had already been reigning terror and things would only get worse before they got better for Israel.

but the overall theme of the book, the life of Hosea, and what was going on that made it significant that God would do something so strange, like He does in this instance, are where we will spend more of our time today.

So the best way to set the stage for this is to just read the way that the Bible sets the stage for it. I will read it... you will be disturbed by it...

then we will talk about it. And likely after church we will talk about it more because it is just one of those stories that keeps you talking.

So lets just begin this thing by looking at Hosea 1:2-3

“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.” So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son.”

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To understand the DEPTH of the backstory to this book... you have to first understand the Ten Commandments. Because to you and to me, we grew up seeing posters of tablets with the words “The Ten Commandments” written on top of them, and we have always had this understanding of these things as if it was God making demands of us, and if we don’t follow them then He will punish us.

But that is NOT, AT ALL what they are. The literal translation, that we translate as “the ten commandments” is actually “the ten words” -

Hebrew (eser dabar) - “dabar” דָּבָר
Greek (Septuagint) - “deka logos” -

and what the Hebrew people believed the ten commandments to be was a ten word Ketubah. A Ketubah, in Jewish culture, is a marriage contract.

It is the terms of your marriage laid out IN ADVANCE and agreed upon by both parties...

The very first thing we get from God in the Ten Commandments is this line: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery”

Which was HUGELY important... God starts by saying to Israel... ALWAYS REMEMBER WHERE YOU CAME FROM, AND WHY YOU AREN'T THERE ANYMORE! It is all because of grace.

I have pulled you out of something awful, and have offered EVERYTHING THAT I AM, TO YOU. This is a marriage.

Think about it... for the Israelites, they had just been slaves for 430 years, never getting a day off. Suddenly, there is this agreement that in this marriage, we take a day off... one day just you and me. Its not death... its life!

In this marriage, there are no gods before me, and in fact no idols or other gods at all... its an exclusive relationship... thou shall not covet what is not yours... in this relationship, we are content with what we have... we LOVE the life that God gives us.

We don't hurt other members of the family, or take from them.

It was a Ketubah. It is not hard at all when reading through the Old Testament to see that the writers all spoke of the relationship between God and Israel in the same terms that you would a marriage. All the way down

the Divorce... when Jeremiah literally says that God had to DIVORCE Israel because they had been THAT unfaithful to him.

Jeremiah 3:8 says “for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce.”

So God, who RESCUED Israel... who brought them out of the house of slavery... who just wants a relationship with them... is described throughout the Old Testament as a husband who’s bride doesn’t take their marriage seriously at all. And in fact, runs off, and does whatever she wants, whenever she wants, with whomever she wants.

Israel, time after time after time runs away from God, asks to be back in slavery... complains... doesn’t trust God... builds idols and worships other gods... doesn’t do what God tells them to do. That is the story of Israel woven throughout the entire Old Testament, because that is the story of us.

People who are recklessly pursued by the never-ending love of a God who has sacrificed EVERYTHING for us, yet time after time after time we live our lives AS IF WHAT He did for us doesn’t even matter in our lives.

Now... Hosea.

Hosea is a PROPHET.

The role of prophet changed in the New Testament, but in the Old Testament, a prophet literally SPOKE FOR GOD. That was his job. Hebrews 1 begins by saying “in the days of Old (in the Old Testament) - God spoke through the prophets” - and in the case of the old testament prophets, the Bible will usually describe it something like this:

“the word of the Lord came to _____” - which is how Hosea starts...

Basically, God is telling Hosea, I am giving you something not many others have... I am making you a prophet. I am giving you the authority to speak for me.

But before you can speak for me, first, you have to understand me.

So God tells Hosea to go and to marry a prostitute. Someone who HE KNEW had been with many other people, and someone he KNEW would NOT remain faithful to him.

Hosea... give up the dream of that perfect marriage, because I need something different from you.

Then, Hosea, you will be able to speak on behalf of me, because you will know what I went through. You will understand what I am going through as Israel continues to be unfaithful time and time again.

Israel's relationship with God was so screwed up, that God had to have his prophet marry a prostitute, so that he could understand the heart of God, and properly speak on his behalf.

Now, to set this up a little more, I want us to remember what we have learned about MERCY.

In the beatitudes Jesus says "blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" - the only beatitude in which you get the exact same thing that you gave. Give mercy... be shown mercy. In the Greek its the word "eleos" and what it means is "active compassion" -

it is seeing the world through someone else's eyes... seeing it from their perspective so that you can actually give them what they need in that moment, rather than through your own eyes which are likely judgmental and are much more likely to give them what they deserve.

For Hosea, this probably felt a bit backward. Like, "God, why do I have to be the one who empathizes with you? Why do I have to give this enormous part of my life, so that I can see the world through your eyes?" But it is what God asked of THIS PARTICULAR PROPHET.

so Hosea goes and he marries Gomer.

Now, we aren't going to get very into the later prophesies in this book, because its the story of Hosea I am most interested in sharing with you...

but the first thing that recorded is that Hosea and Gomer have some kids... and God tells them what to name the kids... their son is named Jezreel, because God said that in just a little while, he will punish Israel.

Then they had a daughter, and God told them to name their daughter "No mercy" because God says that "Israel is going to get what it deserves"

Then they had another Son, and God told them to name him "not my people" - to tell Israel "you are not my people."

creative. Some people believe, based on the child's name, that the third child wasn't even Hosea's.

So God here is looking pretty merciless! He named one of the kids NO MERCY.

And it can be difficult, as people of grace and who view God as all loving and all gracious to read this... because we want to think "God is not like that!" "God shows mercy!" "God is forgiving!" But when you read Hosea chapter one, it actually says that "God won't have mercy and forgive them at all" (v.6)

But this is very important - especially when you are reading the Old Testament, and this is part of the reason that we are doing this event in October with Shane, because if we don't know how to read these ancient documents then we will read Hosea one, as the stage is being set... and never get to Hosea three, where the story culminates with one of the greatest images in the entire Bible of HOW GRACIOUS GOD IS. But literature was written this way... because its good story telling and it is a more accurate picture of grace TO FIRST SHOW YOU WHAT YOU DESERVE before showing you what you actually get... because grace is meant to be a point for change... for conversion, not an excuse to stay the same.

Grace always carries more weight when you know the load that you should be carrying.

When you know what SHOULD happen to you.

and if you never feel the weight of what it is that you deserve, if you never see how it affects anyone else, or you never feel the affect that it is having on your own life, there would be no reason to stop doing it.

So what God does here through the prophet is he first describes what Israel DESERVES... what you deserve... what I deserve...

before ultimately doing what God does... and gives us what we DON'T DESERVE.

Now... lets leave Hosea lingering there for just a few minutes... with a wife of whoredom who keeps cheating on him... with three kids who are named after how angry God seems to be with Israel... and the fate of God's people hanging in the balance, and lets turn to the New Testament, to Matthew chapter 9.

Because when Jesus walked on earth, it seemed like he always chased after the Gomer's. He met the woman at the well who had been married 5 times and was now living with a man not even her husband... He saved the woman caught in adultery... and here, starting in Matthew 9:9, Jesus calls a man named Matthew, out of a disgusting life of being an oppressor of people, and into someone who would be hugely instrumental in changing the world.

Matthew was Jewish, and also a tax collector who had bought the rights from the Roman Empire to tax his own people on behalf of Rome. So he was able to tax people the amount owed to Rome, plus whatever he wanted to take off the top for himself each time. Really what he was, was a traitor. A person who exploited his own people, for his own gain. So people really didn't like him much, which was obvious, because when Jesus invited Matthew to drop that life, and come with Him on the greatest adventure he could ever imagine, people started to talk. And then Jesus went to his house and hung out with Matthew and a bunch of his tax collector and sinner friends.

And it is at seeing Jesus at a table with ALL THOSE sinners, that the Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples "why does your teacher eat with sinners?"

and even though they asked the disciples the question, it was Jesus who answered:

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor... but those who are sick.”

and it is easy, as a person who grew up in the church, to read that line as “I need to not spend all my time with other Christians who are already saved, I need to go into the broken places and go after the broken people (all true.) but if you read it like that, and you insert yourself in the story, who does that make you?

Someone who thinks that Jesus is talking about someone else. You would be one of the ones who don't think they need a doctor. Right? And that is a dangerous place to live. If you use it strictly as a missional verse, you are right for going after the lost, but yet you miss what it says about you.

I used to read this and think this was just saying, “I am eating with the ones who actually need me. They are the sick ones. So they can get better and we can be one big happy family who doesn't sin anymore”

But what if He is actually saying, “I don't eat with people who think that they don't need me. I only come into the lives of the ones who know that without me, they are lost.”

It is pretty hard to FIND MERCY, if you are living in such a way that IF IT WERE SHOWN TO YOU, YOU WOULDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE IT.

God can't do any work on the heart of a person who doesn't think that they need it. Which makes the religious person even further removed from the gospel than the sinner.

Then Jesus continues, striking another huge blow to the Pharisees when he quotes... wait for it... the prophet Hosea (Hosea 6:6) and then He tells them to go learn what it means.

He says: Educate yourselves, because the thing that you thought was the main thing, is not the main thing after all. Here is what It says:

“I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”

to a group of people who have built their entire religion around what they don't do, this would have hurt. The Pharisees were really good at giving stuff up, (really good at sacrifice) but for all the wrong reasons. They would fast for weeks, but they never treated people like they had *value* unless that person had something to offer them.

They would tithe, but would neglect the weightier matters of the law: justice, mercy, and faithfulness. (Matthew 23:23)

And Jesus is telling them, “until you can take your eyes off of what you have given up, and put your eyes on me, you will never find me.” At the heart of it is a simple truth, and that is that Jesus cares more about the way you treat people than he does about the things that you give up thinking it will bring you closer to him. What he desires is mercy.

Now...

Any footnote in any bible will tell you that here, Jesus IS quoting Hosea 6:6... there can be no doubt about it that what Jesus was doing was INTENTIONALLY quoting something that the Pharisees would have already known... but here is thing... and honestly, I think that this gives us an even wider image of what mercy is...

Because in Matthew 9 it says “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” but in Hosea 6:6, it actually says “I desire steadfast love, not sacrifice”

You get the word “mercy” many times throughout Hosea... like when he names his daughter NO MERCY... its the Hebrew word “*racham*” (ra-ham)

But Hosea in 6:6 uses a different Hebrew word here... the word is “*chesed*” (ka-said) -

the imagery behind “chesed” - in the root word it paints a picture of a mother swan, who plucks out her own feathers and lines her nest with them so that her offspring can rest comfortably.

Its the image of a mother, giving up her own comfort for her children.

one of the most common descriptions of God in the Old Testament is this:

God you are “abounding in steadfast kindness” -

You are abounding in “*chesed*”

its a line in Exodus 34... its not the first time “*chesed*” is used in the Bible, but its the first time it is phrased this way...

in fact, John Mark Comer wrote a book about this verse... and in his book he shows how this passage is actually THE MOST QUOTED PASSAGE IN THE BIBLE, BY THE BIBLE. Other Bible writers quote what Moses writes in Exodus 34 about God more than any other verse in the Bible.

God you are “abounding in steadfast kindness”

In a few minutes we will contextualize Exodus 34 and have a MUCH better understanding for just how significant this phrase is but not yet.

So the Bible quotes this description of God more than it quotes anything else.

Which is amazing... but the fact that when Jesus talks to the Pharisees at the party, and he quotes THIS VERSE...

Its almost as if Jesus is showing us what mercy looks like, EVEN BETTER THAN the descriptions that we are able to come up with. Better than merely “active compassion” or even “seeing the world through someone else’s eyes”

This is mercy:

Jesus brought on the ridicule of the religious so that he could accept the sinner...

He later would bring on the whips and the nails and the beatings and mocking of the Romans so that WE could be saved.

God, you are abounding in steadfast love. You give up your own well being... your own comfort, even your own life... for the sake of your children.

Like a swan, who plucks out her own feathers and lines the nest to give your offspring something soft to rest on.

That is what God is like.

And we like to view Him as being angry... as having no mercy... Because God is loving enough to let us feel it enough that we actually realize that we are doing something wrong...

SO THAT WE ACTUALLY CHANGE...

but God never stays there... because God is not angry... God is abounding in steadfast love.

Watch this! Back to Hosea... chapter one... God is angry... Israel is rebellious, breaking their covenant... Gomer is unfaithful, of course... then we get to chapter two.

and this is one element of Hosea that people miss, because its worded kind of strangely. But in Hosea two, the Bible talks about a time in their marriage when Gomer was just gone. She had gone on to other men, the way the Bible says it is "I will go after my lover"

doing the prostitute thing, forgetting about Hosea.

And this is what it says... it says that in that place, wherever she went... she was taken care of. She had bread and water, wool and flax, oil and drink.

and she is satisfied because she thinks that she has what she needs. Like “I don’t need Hosea - I seem to be okay wherever I go - these men take care of me just as much as he did.”

But then do you know what verse 7 and 8 say? There will come a time when those guys will leave. Because everything that is selfish and evil always leaves you empty. and when that day comes, she says “I will go back to Hosea, it was better for ME there!!!”

Still only thinking about herself.

And then verse 8 gives us one of the greatest Gospel messages in the entire Bible that Hosea personally lived out. It says this... and its easy to read over this because its written so briefly...

but it says that the entire time that Gomer was getting taken care of by “her lovers” - all that oil and wool and flax and drink... all that food...

from the beginning... from the time that she left Hosea to seek out other lovers... WITHOUT HER EVEN KNOWING IT... the Bible says that it was HOSEA who was giving her everything she needs. It paints this picture of Hosea, behind the scenes, following behind her at a distance. Not stalking her, but caring for her because he knew that none of her perverted gross lovers who only viewed her as an object were going to do it. And so every chance he could get, when she wasn’t looking... he would pay her bills... he would get her food... he would give the gross men she was with the money and say “take care of my wife” - remember... verse 5 says that GOMER believed that her lovers were taking care of her.

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Have you ever felt so far from God... you have just made your own way and the entire time you knew deep down that it was wrong but something in you just wouldn’t turn back... and yet in the most gracious, amazing way you get these subtle reminders that God hasn’t given up on you?

and now, when you look back on what happened you see so clearly... clear as day that someone was paying your bills... someone was carrying you... someone had their hand on you even when you were running from Him?

you don't even recognize where the grace is coming from, yet you know in your heart that someone, somewhere is taking care of you even as you endeavor down this broken road?

Last week we baptized two people in the Detroit river... about 30 or so of us gathered, and it was so cold... the wind was blowing... the Sunday before was 90, today it is 80's... I looked at my weather when we were there and it said "59" - no sun.

Yet these two women went out to the River, and 30 some of us came to support them and hear their stories. And I am not going to tell their stories again this morning, you all heard one last week here before we left... but they were stories of REDEMPTION and those of us who were there will never forget it because it is INCREDIBLE WHAT GOD DID. Stories of people who walked a path that was very dangerous, and yet in hindsight, when, by the grace of God they made it to the other side of that story.... it became obvious that God was carrying them the entire time.

Making sure they are okay.

We are hearing stories like this almost every day.

okay now follow me here... I know that for being "Cliff Notes" - this sermon is taking a lot of loops and is a bit to follow. They won't all be like this... but this is just incredible.

Turn to Hosea 11.

verse 1 and 2:

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols...

verse 3:

“Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them.”

They did not know that it was me. It was me who taught them to walk... who carried them... who healed them... who picked them up every time that they fell, even though they spit in my face... turned their backs on me... worshipped other gods...

then verses 5-7, you get what appears to be the wrath of God on this people who have betrayed him...

“They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king (which does happen for a season), because they have refused to return to me. The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels. My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all. ”

Once again, you have God, making Israel feel like they are going to get what they deserve... until you get to verse 8 and 9...

“How can I hand you over, or Israel?...

My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.”

God says that “My heart *recoils*”

its the Hebrew word “*haphak*” and it means to overthrow. It was a word used to describe when an army would come into a city and they would overthrow that city and they would leave the city in a million pieces.

God is saying... I am overturning myself. Overthrowing what I had originally said... because I am merciful. But its not a word that means that GOD just

simply changed his mind... this is important... because when a city gets overthrown, it is left a mess... it is left in pieces.

It can NOT be put back together again. It can only be rebuilt with new material.

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In Exodus 20, there is this famous moment when Moses goes up on Mount Sinai. The rest of Israel doesn't want to go with him... they send him up and say "tell us what God says."

and what God gives him when he is up there, is the Ketubah. The Marriage Contract. The Ten Commandments.

But fast forward to Exodus 32... and Israel sees that Moses was taking a really long time up on the mountain with God... and they start to get really anxious and so they gather together, and they decide to make gods out of their gold rings... and they mold all of their gold together to build this weird golden calf thing, and they start worshipping it.

And when they worship it, they worship it saying "these are your gods that brought us out of the land of Egypt." (Exodus 32:4)

The very thing that God said FIRST in the contract... ABOUT ANOTHER GOD. The next two things written in the Ketubah.

And God is really angry about this. And he tells Moses that he will destroy them all, and start over. But Moses pleads with God to spare Israel, and God agrees.

But Moses comes down from the mountain, he himself is so incredibly angry that he takes the two tablets, and he throws them at the foot of the mountain and the tablets shatter into pieces that can never be put back together again.

And God, who has relented on destroying Israel, once again becomes the image bearer of grace...

Because though the covenant was broken, but it was still right. It was still the best thing that could have ever happened to them.

So God gave them another covenant, but with the *same terms*.

Exodus 34 starts by God telling Moses, “cut for yourself two tablets of stone, just like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke.”

So Moses does that. And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there (Exodus 34:5) and this time, before he lays out a single commandment, God says this:

“The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands...”

“*chesed*”

Abounding in Steadfast love. Like a mother swan, who plucks out her own feathers to line the nest with them, so that her young may rest comfortably.

and they start the whole process all over again. They write out the terms, and they are still the same. Almost like it was the first time.

God says “I will make a covenant with you”

God says “its an awesome thing that I will do with you.”

Your past doesn't go away. Its written into stone. But the love of God has this way of shattering that stone into a million pieces because it is already broken anyway... and you get a new tablet... and then He tells you the same thing.

Because God is the God of second chances, and third chances and hundredth chances. He is the God who says you should forgive your brother not seven times, but 70X7 times and all on the same day... because that is what God is like.

And He can't promise you that your past will go away, but what He gives you is a tomorrow. A new tablet. A hope for a future. What He does give you is mercy and steadfast love.

And lastly,

Hosea, chapter 3. It is short, so we will read the whole thing:

“And the Lord said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins.” So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, “You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you.” For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.”

in the end, he buys her back. and in that day, the going rate for a slave was about 30 shekels of silver... Hosea buys her for 15 and some barley... which means, quite frankly, this woman had reached a point in which **NOBODY WANTED HER.**

She had reached the absolute bottom. She was as low as it gets. And Hosea would have sold the whole farm to buy her back if he had too... that much is obvious... but by this time he didn't have to...

And he takes her, and he redeems her life... and he doesn't treat her like the slave she was being sold as... **HE TAKES HER BACK AS HIS WIFE.** He says “you are mine and I am yours... nobody else... no other men... no more adultery. No more cheating.”

Full restoration into our house.

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For Hosea, love cost a whole lot, but every time he was willing to pay the price.

And for Jesus, love had a cost. Jesus was the final Word of God redeeming Israel. He saved them through bringing destruction upon himself... a flesh and blood manifestation of the same love of God who had forgiven his people every single day that they have betrayed him.

He has shown grace through his pain that we caused him.

God himself understands every detail of what Hosea went through, because he went through it Himself. He went through it with Israel... and He went through it with Jesus.

Its as if ultimately Hosea learned what it means to LOVE WHEN IT HURTS, IN ORDER TO REALIZE:

“thats what you are like God?”

that even when someone you love THAT MUCH does so much harm to you, you still love them and pursue them never give up on them because there is nothing more important than that broken person finding life.

How many of us live our lives that way? Where we are willing to lose something, in order that someone else could gain something better? Where we are willing to feel pain, so that we could be a more effective witness of the greatest story ever told?

That we would be willing to be used by God even if it first meant having to empathize with him... even if it means taking off our glasses, and seeing the world through HIS EYES. Through the eyes of the One who loved you so much that in YOUR MOST BROKEN STATE, He laid down his perfect life for yours.

How many would be willing to go through what it would take to say: “me too, God. I get it. The broken people have my heart because they have yours.”

“me too, God. Do whatever it takes to make my life reflect your heart.”

Isaiah (57:15) says that God lives with the contrite, in order to revive their spirit. The literal says “people who are crushed” - God lives with people who are crushed. Who’s lives have been shattered.

and if that is where God lives, then that is where we ought to be living.

If those are the people Jesus died for, then those are the people that we exist for.