

## Here We Go Again

### Hosea 3:1-5 (EHV)

<sup>1</sup> The LORD said to me, "Go again. Show love to a woman who is loved by another man, a woman who keeps committing adultery. Show love just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, even though they keep turning to other gods and loving the raisin cakes." <sup>2</sup> So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and nine bushels of barley. <sup>3</sup> I said to her, "You will stay with me for many days. You must not be promiscuous. You must not be with any other man, and I will also be for you." <sup>4</sup> So the people of Israel will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred memorial stones, and without the special vest or family idols. <sup>5</sup> Afterward the people of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.

"Will you take this man to be your husband? Will you be guided by the counsel and direction God has given in his Word and submit to your husband as the Church submits to Christ? Will you be faithful to him, cherish him, support him, and help him in sickness and in health as long as you both shall live? If so, answer, 'I will.'" This is the typical Christian marriage vow, one committing to lifelong faithfulness according to God's design for marriage, a design implemented all the way back on Day 6 of creation with Adam and Eve.

However, not all spouses honor their vows and remain faithful until death do us part. Why? Jesus tells us, "Because of your hard hearts, Moses permitted you to divorce your wives, but it was not that way from the beginning." (Matthew 19:8) Sinful hearts lie to their spouses, don't cherish their spouses, don't support or help them. Sinful hearts lusting over others leads them to be unfaithful and commit adultery. Sinful hearts won't admit fault or seek reconciliation, but will hold on to how they have been wronged. A sinful heart abuses their spouse, walks out on a marriage. God made laws to allow for divorce because sin breaks a marriage.

So, now the tough question: if God designed marriage to be a lifelong commit but our unfaithfulness breaks a marriage and causes divorce, how many times do I seek and take back an unfaithful spouse? This is what God wants us to consider in our reading from Hosea today.

Hosea is a prophet who lived and served the Lord in the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century B.C., sharing God's Word to the 10 northern tribes of Israel who had broken off from Judah and Jerusalem about 100 years earlier. This is what God told Hosea to do: "Go. Take for yourself an immoral wife and children produced by sexual immorality..." (Hosea 1:2a) God has faithful Hosea, virgin of a man, take a known cheater, an adulterer - someone who will be unfaithful and get pregnant by other men. Why would Hosea ever do this? Why get into a relationship, make vows to be faithful, knowing that his wife won't be? If we were Hosea's friends, wouldn't we be screaming, "Stay away from this woman that God is telling you to marry! This will only end in heartache!"?

But Hosea was faithful to the Lord and his Word. He took a promiscuous woman named Gomer to be his wife. And guess what? She cheated on him. She got pregnant and gave birth to children that were not Hosea's, but he took them as his own. At that time, wouldn't we have said to Hosea, "Why do you stay with her? She's just going to keep on cheating on you. You have no obligation to stay with her. Don't you deserve to have someone to support you, cherish you, help you, and be faithful to you throughout your marriage?"

Then we get to chapter 3 of Hosea's prophecy, our verses for today. The LORD said to me, "Go again. Show love to a woman who is loved by another man, a woman who keeps committing adultery." (verse 1a) Go again? Are you kidding me, God? Do we almost roll our eyes and say, "Here we go again," knowing already how this tragedy plays out? She'll be unfaithful and cheat again. Why does God have Hosea do this? God explains: "Show love just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, even though they keep turning to other gods and loving the raisin cakes." (verse 1b)

The Israelites were grossly unfaithful to the Lord. Even though they had pledged lifelong loyalty and commitment to God, made marriage like vows to him, they were unfaithful in mere days. When they were at Mount Sinai, it was less than 40 before they explicitly broke God's clear commands and made a golden image of a calf that they worshiped as God. After they entered the promised land, they were not faithful in driving out the people as God had commanded them. During the time of the Judges, they continually turned their backs on the Lord and went to other gods. They vowed to be faithful to one God, to be monotheistic, and yet over and over again they lusted after other gods, sought relationships with them, committed adultery against God.

As bad as the Israelites were, we need to ask ourselves: have I ever been unfaithful to God? When people join Light of the Valley, they make vows – vows to faithfully conform our whole lives to God and his teachings, suffering all things, even death, rather than being unfaithful to God. How faithful have we been? Have we loved, honored, cherished, and been faithful to God every single day

since then? Or did we drift away from God, grew apart from him, felt like other people will love us better? Did we seek pleasure and fulfillment from other relationships – relationships with people – boyfriends, girlfriends, husbands, wives, family, friends? Did we seek fulfillment and meaning from work, school, recreation? Did we seek out someone who would love me for me and not ask me to change anything? If we compare our relationship to God like a marriage, have we been 100% faithful or have our eyes wandered?

Maybe you are thinking, “What’s the big deal. No one’s perfect. No one is completely faithful all the time. At least I stopped myself before things got worse.” – unless you didn’t and you broke vows to your spouse, let alone your vows to God. This is why God has Hosea go again and reconcile with Gomer. He wants us to think about our relationship with him like a marriage. When we see it visually between Hosea and Gomer, we know that our faithfulness has lapsed. We are like Gomer. We have been unfaithful to God.

Seeing our relationship with God exemplified in Hosea and Gomer, we also begin to understand how boundless God’s faithful love is to us. God tells Hosea to go again to his adulterous, unfaithful wife. She doesn’t deserve him. He should seek someone more faithful. Instead, Hosea shows marital faithfulness even with someone who has sinned against him with unfaithfulness.

So, here we go again – but in a good way. I, [Hosea] bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and nine bushels of barley. I said to her, “You will stay with me for many days. You must not be promiscuous. You must not be with any other man, and I will also be for you.” (verses 2-3) Hosea paid the price for Gomer’s unfaithfulness. It’s hard to put a modern-day equivalent on the price but suffice to say that this was not loose change that Hosea had lying around. Hosea’s name means “salvation.” He saved Gomer from her unfaithfulness by the price he paid, much like the descendant of King David, Jesus, would do for all the Israelites and for all of us.

Having paid the price for her salvation from her unfaithfulness, a new course of action would follow. Hosea had already shown his faithfulness in pursuing Gomer and paying the price to get her back, and he would continue to be faithful to her. She was to renew her vows of faithfulness to him. She was to change from being unfaithful to faithful because of what Hosea did.

This is what God has done for us. When we were unfaithful and strayed, God did not just say, “Boys will be boys,” or “she’ll come back once she has kids and needs to settle down.” No, as we heard in the Gospel reading, Jesus left the 99 faithful sheep and sought the 1 lost sheep, the one whose eyes caused them to wander away. He went after us, pursued us to rescue us from our unfaithfulness. He paid the price for us with his perfect life and his sacrificial death. He changed us from a status of unfaithful to faithful. And when we strayed again, God didn’t throw his hands into the air and say, “Here we go again.” No, he simply went again after us because God does not give up on us. He remains faithful and continues to go after us again and again and renew his faithfulness to us and have us renew our faithfulness to him because he paid the price for our unfaithfulness.

God does this to change us from being unfaithful to faithful. We now live that out in our relationship to our God, that we love, honor, cherish, and are faithful to him like we would a spouse, that he would be our priority, our first love above all things, that we don’t let our eyes wander to other gods, to be fulfilled by other relationships, seeking only our selfish pleasure. Having been saved by God, we now live this faithfulness in our earthly relationships as a reflection of God’s love for us, being faithful when so many things try to pull us to be unfaithful.

God’s gift of marriage to us has always been meant as a picture of our relationship with him. He personified it to his people through Hosea and Gomer’s relationship. While the rest of the world may scream that God should leave us because of our unfaithfulness, he goes after us again. He pursues us faithfully, always takes us back. He pays the price for our unfaithfulness, saves us, changes us. Thank you, God, for going after us again and again. Make us always faithful to you. Amen.