

June 7, 2020

Majoring in the Minors
Hosea: Relentless Love
Hosea 3:1-5

Opening Words: Lost in the back of the Old Testament are the Minor Prophets. There are twelve in all. This is the list: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. In the traditional Hebrew canon they are listed chronologically. Our canon is more concerned with length. Regardless, the order does not matter because each one is independent. It is important to note, they are not considered minor because they are not important. They are considered minor because they are brief in comparison to the Major Prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Many consider the Minor Prophets to books of judgement. However, they are much more complex. They are books that paint a picture of God who never stops pursuing those who broke his heart.

This is sermon number two in my twelve-part sermon series, *Majoring in the Minors*. We began last week, Pentecost, with Joel's prophecy about the Holy Spirit. (Joel 2:28-29) Next week we will look at Amos. He tells us true piety takes the form of social action. Today, we are going to look at Hosea. It is a story about God's relentless love. Our scripture reading for today is Hosea 3:1-5. Let me call this message *Relentless Love*.

Hosea 3:1-5 The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."
² So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. ³ Then I told her, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man, and I will behave the same way toward you."
⁴ For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. ⁵ Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.

Many years ago, before man walked on the moon, before a civil war threatened to divide America, or before Columbus discovered a New World, there was a man who spoke for God. His name meant "salvation," but we just call him Hosea. He lived in the middle of the eighth century BC, shortly after Amos. Those were dark days for the Northern Kingdom of Israel. The Assyrians were coming and soon their independence would be gone. The history of Hosea is interesting, but Hosea's literary style is perplexing. It goes against our moral standards. This is Hosea's story. It is found in the first three chapters.

God tells Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman. Let me just say it clearly. God tells the prophet to marry a prostitute. I would not recommend that practice to any contemporary clergy. It is a strange request to our mortal ears. But Hosea does as God requests. Hosea marries a prostitute. Her name was Gomer. In time, the prophet and the prostitute have three children. Their names are both significant and odd. The first child is a boy named Jezreel, which means "God scatters." The second child is a girl named Lo-Ruhamah, which means "not loved." Then, they have a second boy named Lo-Ammi, which means "not my people." You cannot help but pity the children. No one should be saddled with such horrible names. Then, the story takes a predictable turn. The unfaithful Gomer leaves Hosea with the children. She returns to her old vocation. Hosea has every reason to wash his hands of her, but he does not do it. Instead, according to our reading for today, he tries to reconcile with her. Hosea's friends must have been disgusted with him, and they must have asked, why? There is only one answer. The faithful Hosea wants to reconcile with the unfaithful Gomer because he loves her. True love is relentless. So, why Hosea's story important to you and me?

Hosea has been called a thinly veiled drama. It is not just a story about the faithful Hosea and the unfaithful Gomer. From an Old Testament perspective, it is the story about a faithful God and the unfaithful Northern Kingdom of Israel. God can simply not let Israel go. From a New Testament perspective, it is a story about a faithful God and an unfaithful church. The church is not perfect. We have all fallen short of the glory of God. However, one can also make the case, it is the story of a faithful God and his unfaithful disciples. No matter what angle you look, Hosea is story about God's relentless love. It is a timeless story. God pursued the people in the eighth century BC and pursues us today. Never underestimate the power of God's love. C. S. Lewis (1898-1963) was a British writer and lay theologian. He taught English literature at both Oxford and Cambridge. He once said, "*Though our feelings come and go, God love for us does not.*" If you believe God loves you, say "**Amen!**" Never underestimate the power of God's love.

I came across an article on-line this week. I do know the author, but I do know the title, *God is love: 5 Implications of this Amazing Attribute of God*. The five are important for us to remember today. This is the list:

- 1. We can trust in God's love.** It is impossible for God not to love us. Love is God's very nature. Even in our sinfulness, God loves us. He is always patient and merciful with us. For example, after Adam and Eve sin, God expels them from the garden but not before providing clothes to cover their nakedness. You can trust God's love!
- 2. Our salvation is an expression of God's love.** God did not send Jesus as a reward for the obedient, but rather a ransom for the defiant. Jesus displays his love throughout his ministry. God loves us so much, he sent Jesus so we could spend eternity with Him. Salvation is an expression of God's love!

- 3. Our ability to love is enabled through God's love.** Jesus showed us how to love. When Jesus washed the disciple's feet, he was telling them he loved them. He tells us to love our neighbors and enemies. It is through our love the world will know we belong to Christ. God showed us how to love!
- 4. We can rest in God's love.** That only happens when you discover and accept the fact that God's love is unconditional. God knows our very nature is to sin, but He does not hold that against us. When we understand Christ is our advocate, we can rest in assurance of God's love. We can rest in God's love!
- 5. We can have confidence in God's love.** The scriptures tell us countless times of God's love. He will vindicate his children and promote His Kingdom until his plan and purpose come to full fruition. We can have confidence in God's love!

You cannot run from the truth. God loves you! God's love is relentless. That is an important divine truth because we live in such complex times. Just think about it for a moment.

We are living in extraordinary times. The pandemic caused by the coronavirus has changed everything and has made everything difficult. Just think about it. It is a hard time graduate. We never thought twice about it. For years, we sat in crowded classroom. For years, we sat in large crowds and waited for our names to be called at commencement. We would walk across the stage and receive a hug from our teachers and friends. Now a honk from a car horn will have to suffice. It is a hard time to graduate. It is a hard time to die. For years, people stood in long lines to express their condolences. Everyone got a handshake, a hug, or a kiss. No one worried about social distancing. Now the crowd has been replaced by a few. Every funeral home has their own rules. Every funeral director has their own rules. Every cemetery has their own rules. Some cemeteries refuse the family to enter for the burial at all. It is a hard time. It is a hard time to married. For years, brides and grooms dreamed of their big day. Surrounded by family and friends, they would say those sacred vows. Their reception would be filled with food, dancing, and drinking. The cookie table would hold a countless number of calories. Now the crowd has been whittled down, the food must be consumed on paper plates using plastic silverware. There will be no dancing because you may be responsible for someone else's death. It is a hard time to get married. It is a hard time to be hospitalized. The medical care has not changed but the experience has. The sick must lay there completely alone. No one is permitted to be surrounded by loved ones and no clergy can visit for a prayer. This is the saddest truth. People are dying alone. It is a hard time to be hospitalized. It is a hard time to have job. We have had to learn how to do everything in a new electronic way. It is a harder time not to have a job. It is a hard time to be a teacher or a student. That relationship is important,

but it is now suddenly changed, if not permanently damaged. People are wondering about future of American education. I could continue, but I will not.

It is a hard time to do anything. The rules keep changing and everyone who has ever driven by a hospital is suddenly a medical expert. Please do not listen to my medical advice because I have no medical knowledge. The things we took for granted our entire lives are suddenly gone. People are not just worried about the coronavirus. Some are terrified of the coronavirus. Some are afraid of their groceries. Can I be honest we you? I am tired of being warned and threatened. I am tired of being told to keep my distance. I am tired being told to wash my hands. I am tired of being told to wear my mask. It makes me anxious and raises my already high blood pressure, which will lead to a heart attack, which will kill me faster than the coronavirus. I am not dumb. I learned all those things in the first five minutes. Telling me for the thousandth time in a thousandth different way just frustrates me. I am tired of rich and famous celebrities telling us to stay healthy, when they do not even know I am alive. The whole thing is exhausting. I had a friend tell me recently if this is the new normal, then she wants to die. This is not living. I found myself agreeing with her. I wondered on that night how things could get worse, then they got worse.

The news can out of Minneapolis, Minnesota and sent a shock wave through our country. The story is ugly. The video is uglier. It is all more than we can handle. Forty-six years old, George Floyd died in a Minneapolis hospital. He was an African American. His death was senseless. A white police officer had his knee on his neck for nearly nine minutes. The Minneapolis Police Department said at first Floyd resisted arrest. Then video revealed the true story. With that knee on his neck, he was begging for his life. His words fell on deaf ears. Even other near-by police officers did nothing. The event has sent our country into a whirlwind. Once again, race riots have become part of the American story. Our area has not been excluded. Sarcastically, someone told me Mexicans are beginning to build their own wall to keep the problems north of the border. The medical world is upset because few of the rioters and looters are wearing masks or practicing social distancing. It is an ugly story but what can you and I do? Between race riots and the coronavirus our country is full of anxiety. It is more than one person can handle.

I received a text the other day that illustrated the desperateness of the situation. The text simply read: I TRIED TO DO MY DEVOTIONS THIS MORNING BUT I REALLY STRUGGLED. WHEN I PRAY, I LITERALLY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO PRAY ANYMORE. I DO NOT HAVE WORDS. OUR WORLD IS FALLING APART. WHERE IS GOD? I thought for several moments before I responded: I WILL PRAY FOR YOU. I regretted that response. It seemed feeble.

I wish I would have responded: READ HOSEA. It is the story of relentless love. If God hungered to reconcile with his unfaithful people of the eight century BC, then God stands with his victimized people in the present. Never forget it! God loves you! C. S.

Lewis was not wrong. Do you remember his quote? He once said, "*Though our feelings come and go, God love for us does not.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"