

Weird Warnings and Wonderful Promises

Hosea 2:14-3:5; 14:1-9

God sometimes is just simply weird. And we know the prophets are weird. There is a lot of condemnation, but then there are those jewels where God promises his people a future and hope like Jeremiah 29:11. “‘For I know the plans that I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you & not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

And we love messages to us like this from Ezekiel. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (36:26)

But then we read that Isaiah walked around naked for 3 years. (20:2) Jeremiah smashed jars before an audience. In another weird provocative strange act, Jeremiah bought and wore and then buried a new waist sash and then dug it up to discover that it’s ruined, no longer good for anything. (13:1-7) Really!

And why would Ezekiel bake bread over human waste? Ezekiel is a prophet whose sanity can be questioned because of his actions. What is the message of each action?

God asked the prophets to do some weird things – to get a message across, to get people’s attention. They needed to do some unusual outlandish dramatic symbolic act to go along with their message.

Prophets were communicators, and like all great communicators, they utilized a wide range of verbal and nonverbal elements in their prophetic speeches. They didn’t just announce prophecy; they acted it out as well. We can’t see the prophet’s facial expressions, body language and gestures. But they are a key ingredient in the compelling, multi-sensory presentations that fill the prophetic pages. If we want to understand the weird, crazy, eccentric, wonderful world of prophetic communication, we need to understand the visuals, the signs, the actions.

So we have to dig into the prophet’s messages and discover what their weird acts symbolize. Sometimes this takes some work. But in our story today, if we can get over the outlandishness, it’s fairly clear what the symbolic actions represent. It’s an important message and value from Almighty God.

Our **reader’s theater** introduces us to another prophet and his weird crazy instructions from Almighty God.

The whole world loves a love story. We enjoy the popular line – Love makes the world go round. In most of our fictitious movies and novels, we find some kind of love theme. And Hosea’s and Gomer’s is a dozy. The closest example I can think of today, is the movie, *Pretty Woman* which came out in 1990. It’s one of the top-grossing romantic comedies of all time.

But Hosea’s and Gomer’s story, takes the theme of love even farther. We don’t know a lot about Hosea, but he is unique in one respect. God asked him live the tragedy of Israel’s unfaithfulness by marrying a harlot, a prostitute, a whore. Hosea’s name would be Joseph in English which is related to the name Joshua, which means salvation.

Hosea was a preacher in the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom. He was a contemporary of the prophets Isaiah and Amos. Hosea is the first book of the Minor Prophets in the Bible. He is the only one of the writing prophets to come from the northern Kingdom Israel. He lived, as we are told in the first verse of the book, during the reigns of four kings of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. And he lived during the reign of Jeroboam II, the son of Josh, the king of Israel, of the Northern Kingdom. Jeroboam was one of the wicked kings of Israel and the nation was going through a difficult moral time.

People were "living it up," as we might say, and didn't have much time for God. They wouldn't have said that, of course; nobody

ever says that when it is true. Instead they may have said something like many do today, - that it was just a case of not having quite enough time to meet the demands that God made upon them. They were so busy with so many other important things. The spirit was willing but the flesh was ready for the weekend. So people didn't pay much attention to Hosea.

So why is Hosea so important? Hosea is often seen as a "prophet of doom", but underneath his message of destruction is a promise of restoration. More than any other prophet, Hosea linked his message closely with his personal life. By marrying a woman he knew would betray his trust and by giving his children names that sent messages of judgment on Israel, Hosea's prophetic word flowed out of the life of his family. But he also had many words of hope. His story tells us that Holy Scripture is far from just a collection of abstract statements with no relation to real life. Hopefully they impact us in our daily lives and relationships.

The book is structured around cycles of judgment and restoration as the sermon insert shows. Hosea makes clear its repetitious theme: though God will bring judgment on sin, He will always bring His people back to Himself. God's love for Israel, a nation of people more interested in themselves, than in God's direction for their lives, shines through clearly against the darkness of their idolatry and injustice (14:4).

Our focus today is on the first section of Hosea, chapter 1 to 3, which is the story of Hosea and Gomer. The rest of the book, chapters 4 to 14, continues the theme of idolatry, adultery, and prostitution toward other gods and idols, instead of following Lord Jehovah God. So we could say, Hosea is a book that has a lot of repetition, but each time it does so – there are new accusations, new judgments and chastisement, and new ways of God expressing His love.

Imagine the embarrassment of being told by God to go marry a prostitute. I think that's socially worse than Jesus' mother Mary being pregnant out of wedlock. We have to ask, how did Hosea do this? And stick to it?

There is debate about this story being just an analogy or if it actually happened. And we don't know all the exact details. But it's weird. And if we don't catch what God is trying to communicate through Hosea and Gomer, let's take a look at the names of their 3 children. It's another weird warning.

Gomer and Hosea had three children, and each one symbolizes the judgment of God which harlotry always leads to. Many commentators think these children were not Hosea's. If this is the case, it makes this love story even more startling and meaningful.

God told Hosea to name the first one, **Jezeel**, to remind the people of the fury of Jehu, a former king of Israel; (see 2 Kings 9-10) when he killed the 70 sons of Ahab in the city of Jezreel. Even though Jehu was carrying out the purposes of God, he was reckless, impetuous, and high-handed in his dealings. He killed more people than God intended. So when God says that he will "break Israel's bow", He means that this is still Israel's spirit. She is unfaithful, violent, treacherous, and mean spirited.

So the first son stands for this sin of Israel. Imagine how the boy Jezeel was picked on in the school yard. And imagine what people were thinking when they heard that name. They were constantly reminded of their wicked history. It's like naming your child after Canada's most infamous traitor, Joseph Willcocks. He was an MP who switched sides and joined the Americans in the War of 1812. And he worked at destroying the homes and businesses of his constituency.

Then God told Hosea to name the second child, a daughter, **Lo-Ruhamah**. This name means, "I, God will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive

them.” Imagine being reminded every time your name was used, that God had forsaken you. In short this name means, “not loved or not pitied.” That by any measure is a terrible name to give anyone. But, we do need to remember, God was trying to help Hosea, break through to a stubborn people, who were not just ignoring God, but they were disobeying their Creator.

A Biblical comparison, on the positive side, is when the angel told Zechariah he was going to have a son and to name him, John, with a special task to carry out. When John was born the relatives reacted to that name. It got their attention. No one in the family had that name. This was breaking tradition. And it caused people to be filled with awe. Scripture says, “Everyone who heard talked about it asking, ‘What then is this child going to be?’” (Luke 1)

So even though we don’t feel good about the negative names, God uses the importance of names, and the culture of the time to get people’s attention. To wake them up to God’s reality. To impress upon them God’s love despite their infidelities. To let them know how much God despises their sins.

Then Hosea was told to name the second son, the 3rd child, **Lo-Ammi**. This name means, “You are not my people and I am not your God.” Imagine calling your son, “I disown you! You don’t belong to me”? Another symbolic sign. Another effort to get God’s message across to a stubborn people.

These names, are a creative way to explain God’s love, with adulterous people who repeatedly break the covenant, the “marriage vows,” between God and humans. We have to wonder about these three children’s mental health. But I suspect Hosea did a wonderful job of raising and loving his children, and explaining they were part of God’s work.

God is showing through these names, that His mercy will come to an end, and that He will cast off Israel as His people. There is a

point of no return in the faithlessness of a wife and the people. Israel was crossing that line. What a warning! But God still reached out – hoping Israel and Gomer would return. Hosea’s and God’s love never wavered.

Stop and think about what it would take for a loving father or mother to say to an adult child: “I disown you. I disinherit you. You are no longer my son or my daughter. I will not show you anymore love, mercy, or pity, no matter how much you cry out to me!” It would take decades of rebellion, hate, and evil atrocities on the part of an adult child to merit such a harsh judgment, right? God wants us to feel His heart here, which has been broken and trampled on, for centuries, by people He loved, rescued and cared for all those years!

It’s important to point out, immediately after talking about the children, **scripture promises**, “... in the place where it was said to them, ‘You are not my people,’ it shall be said to them, ‘Children of the living God...’...for great shall be the day of Jezreel.” (1:10-11)

And at the end of chapter 2 we read this promise, “On that day I will answer, says the LORD, I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth; & the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, & the oil, & they shall answer Jezreel; and I will sow him for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah, and I will say to Lo-ammi, “You are my people”; and he shall say, “You are my God.” (21-23) This is wonderful!

It’s fascinating that God wants to ultimately restore our relationship with Him. And he uses the intimate and personal language of “son” to describe His wayward people. Here is what chapter 11, verse one says. “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” This is reminding us that God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt. It also illustrates that Almighty God sees himself as Father, as Israel is called a wayward son rather than the unfaithful wife.

And this echoes that Joseph, Mary and Jesus fled to Egypt from King Herod, but God brought them back for Jesus' ministry in Palestine. So notice, how Jehovah gives us a variety of signs and historical facts and ways of understanding God's desire to be the Creator God of Israel, us and humankind.

The book of Hosea shows our Creator's desire to bring us back to Him, even when we have been as unfaithful as Gomer. Hosea married a harlot to act out God's relation to faithless Israel. Her children's names symbolize God's judgment which unfaithfulness causes. And God instructed Hosea to go rescue and buy Gomer back. The promise is given that some day the judgment for Israel will be reversed. It has been bought back, through Jesus' blood on the cross.

So I hope you read the book of Hosea if you haven't already. There is much more that can be explained and learned. You can get a hint of the variety of themes and warnings and God's blessing in the bulletin insert. The prophet describes judgement that is coming soon as well as in the last days. But God's love ultimately wins out – it's God's nature.

Hosea did the unthinkable. Old Testament prophets are known for opposing sin and even wish for sinners to be destroyed. Hosea did. But he consorted with a sinner. And worse – publically! He was politically incorrect. What did people think?

Hosea defined the firm line between Israel's sin and God, yet he blurred the public common religious line by marrying Gomer. And worse, sticking with her, through three children who probably were not his own. And then going and getting Gomer back. What a scandal! It's weird! It's wonderful!

Isn't that what Jesus did when he welcomed the sinful woman who sat at Jesus' feet. Isn't that what the prodigal son parable is about? And it's beyond words – that Jesus keeps welcoming you and I back, when we stray!

To close, here is another word picture. A little boy built a sailboat. When it was ready he took it to the lake and pushed it in hoping it would float sail. And it did. But when a breeze came along, before the boy knew it, the boat was out of reach. All he could do was simply watch it go out of sight.

When he went home crying, his mother asked, "What's wrong, didn't it work?"

The boy replied, "It worked too well."

A few days later when the boy was downtown, he happened to see his boat in a store window. So he walked in, checked it out, proclaimed it was his boat, and tried to walk out with it.

The owner of the shop said, "Wait a minute, that's my boat. I bought it."

The boy said, "No, it my boat. I made it." And showed him why he knew it was his.

But the proprietor said, "I'm sorry but you have to buy it."

So the little boy worked hard and saved his money and finally he had enough to buy the boat. As he left the store, he was heard saying, "You are my boat. You are twice my boat. First, I made you. Second you are my boat because I bought you."

If you ever think you aren't worth much, just remember what God thinks of you. Your Creator made you, and then the Almighty redeemed you on the cross. That's the message of Hosea and God's Old Testament prophets. God wants everyone back. The prophets often have to be weird to our receive our attention so we understand their their wonderful promises. Their message is often doom and gloom and condemnation – because we deserve it. But their goal is to tell us and demonstrate to us, how much Yahweh God loves us. He sent his Son Jesus to redeem us. Hosea, Gomer, & the children are a weird warning & a wonderful promise.