

## **A STRANGE LOVE STORY**

This was the first of a series of four evening sermons by Dr Nat Schluter on the Old Testament book of Hosea in which he dealt with Chapters 1 – 3.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Hosea has been described as 'a stark, full-length poem of inexhaustible power' ....it is a book for adults...., one which deals with life's complexities and pain.

As adults, we need an adult faith. One of the reasons some people reject Christianity is that their understanding of God is naïve. In Hosea, we discover life in the raw. Hosea was called to minister to a generation of God's people who were affluent, decadent, immoral, scheming....and the question was – how would God respond to their wayward state.

How does God respond to us in this condition? Hosea gives us an answer – and it is an answer that is more sobering and more wonderful than we could imagine.

### **OUTLINE OF SERMON**

There are three things God wanted his people to understand:

**1. Our relationship with God is like a marriage – there is wonderful intimacy.**

It is a relationship of priority.

It is a relationship intimacy.

It is a relationship of life-changing potency.

**2. Our relationship with God is like a bad marriage – there is anger and pain.**

**3. God restores his marriage – God's faithful perseverance.**

**1. OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS LIKE A MARRIAGE – THERE IS WONDERFUL INTIMACY**

The view of God as a king or shepherd or father is simplistic. The bible teaches us that God must also be seen as a husband (Hosea, Jeremiah, Ezekiel 16, Isaiah 54). He is not a one dimensional cartoon – like figure a view held of God that denies his infinity capacity to impact on all the complexities of our lives.

In Hosea, we discover God not only as the judge and the father but perhaps more than anywhere else in the bible as.....God the lover, God the faithful husband. God wants an intense personal, intimate, binding and enduring relationship with us....the kind of relationship a bride has with her groom:

- a relationship of priority

In the relationship of marriage, our spouse has to be the number one priority in our life. Through the metaphor of marriage, we learn from Hosea that God desires a relationship with us in which he is of first importance.

- a relationship of intimacy

As marriage is intimate, so, God says, we cannot know him from afar. We cannot know about him.....we must experience his love and bear a sense of his love on our hearts.

- a relationship of life-changing potency

Marriage is the human relationship that sets the course of our life. In the same way, God says, our relationship with him should be one which results in a life-changing experience.

## 2. **OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS LIKE A BAD MARRIAGE – THERE IS ANGER AND PAIN**

God's injunction to Hosea, in a desperate attempt to reach his wayward people, was to embark on a ministry that would serve to graphically illustrate to them the extent to which they were in rejection of him. So he asks Hosea to marry a prostitute; and Hosea marries Gomer, a loose adulterous woman, who behaves towards Hosea just as we are seen by God to behave towards him : as a shallow, mercenary, unfaithful, cheating spouse would do....and as if that's not enough, it is clear that the children Gomer has are not all Hosea's!

The names which God gives Hosea for his children express God's feelings towards the dual nations of Israel – the ten tribes in the north, often referred to as Israel; and the two in the south, called Judah. His instructions to Hosea are to call his three children: 'Jezreel' ; a place of opprobrium, where Jehu had massacred his rivals to gain the throne; 'Lo-Ruhamah', meaning 'not loved' ; and 'Lo-Ammi' , meaning 'not my people'. These were harsh pronouncements of judgement on the profligacy of Israel and Judah of the day and testimony to the anger of God with his people.

God's grieving is to be seen also in the words of verses 1 – 13 of Chapter 2, which reveal the extent of Hosea's - and God's – hurt and anger at the unfaithfulness they have had to endure.

What is to be learnt from Hosea's marriage to the harlot, Gomer? Nat offered the following suggestions:

- Partly their marriage signifies the commencement of the process of redemption in Gomer. There are no quick fixes to the problem of rebellious hearts, no waving of the wand to bring wholeness, to sooth the pain. Her hope lay in the long-term commitment of the relationship of marriage.
- Another part of the reason for their marriage was to show Hosea how he was to understand God, to enable him to effectively communicate and minister to the people.
- A third part of the reason is that, by way of the bad marriage metaphor, we are able to grasp the pain and anger in God's heart over sin...not something we would ever have understood if we saw God only as a shepherd, king or our father. God says : until you understand what it is like for the person you care about most to betray you, you cannot understand my love for you and the pain it causes me as you rebel.

### 3. **GOD RESTORES HIS MARRIAGE – GOD'S FAITHFUL PERSEVERANCE**

The culmination of the way in which Gomer chooses to conduct her life is that she finds herself up for sale in the market place, on display, because of the unfaithful, loose life she has led.

This is as bad and broken and as miserable as it can be for anyone. Seemingly without hope, destined for even worse, she is to be sold to the highest bidder.

From Hosea's perspective, even though he had good reason – 1 000 good reasons - to leave her to her fate – God tells him to go again to her and show his love to her.

What a lesson about the incredible, faithful perseverance of God.....and about his love for me and for you!

#### **KEY VERSE**

"So I bought her....." (Hosea 3 : 2).

#### **CONCLUSION**

By the time of Hosea in the C 8th BC, Israel had declined. Like Gomer, God's people stood naked, or almost naked.

Imagine the sacrifice Hosea had to make in going to a public auction where his wife is on display and where he buys her back. And that, says Hosea, is how God loves you and me.

The book cries out the question: When does this happen, that God comes into the market place and pays a price for his people? Where does God show his love for us, like Hosea did for Gomer? Where is there a king in the line of David.....?

In Jesus, God entered the world, the market place, as a bridegroom looking for his faithless wife (Matt. 9 : 15); and on the cross he paid the price to get her back.

Chapter 3 concludes with a message of hope, moving immediately from the life of Hosea to the life of Israel and from the prophet's life to the life of a future king:

"5. Afterwards 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."

This propels us forward to where John sees "*2.....the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And, John says, 'I heard a loud voice from the throne saying 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away' ."* (Revelation 21 : 2 – 4).

**APPLICATION**

What is the nature of your relationship with Jesus? Is it one of priority, intimacy and life-changing potency?

Are you suffering? Is everything going wrong? Maybe God is making you into someone who can speak into other lives.