

Welcome Home: Where the Broken Are Restored!

A sermon based on 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.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

"Now you did it. You've gone and messed up again. Which number time was this? I've honestly lost count. I thought you could change. I thought you would. I hoped against hope that you would be different...that this time, things would be different. You've made so many promises – talked about wanting to be better about this, yet you've broken those promises again and again. I'm not so sure you really even want to change, not how you've kept on crawling back to that disgusting filth."

"You've tried putting up a good front, but everyone knows. They see through you and your thin and fake façade. I won't even tell you what they've started saying when you're not around, what they're calling you. And me, they're saying some of those same things to me...and about me, because of my connection to you. So, I'm not sure how I'm supposed to keep putting up with this. I've been doing this for too long. You've hurt me so many times. I don't know if I can handle this – the lies, unfaithfulness, the hurt, the pain – I don't know if I can handle this anymore."

And you know what it's all been building up to; you can sense what comes next. "I want you back. I'm taking you home. I love you."

Be honest, is that what you were expecting? I didn't even have to tell you the exact situation, but just hearing the conversation around it is enough to make you think, "This is not healthy. It's probably time to pull the plug...on this friendship, this relationship, whatever it is. Things are just too broken. They can't be fixed."

You read through the first couple of chapters of Hosea (I'm not suggesting right now, but sometime), and you see a relationship doomed from the very beginning. At the onset, God commands his prophet Hosea to take an adulterous wife for himself, he ends up marrying this prostitute, Gomer, and you're scratching your head, thinking, "This is a bad idea."

And it proves to be a bad idea, as in our verses, we learn she's been shacking up with some other guy, and you're like, "I told you so. It was broke before it even got off the ground."

But now, you add in this little detail, where this all was God's idea. He was the one playing match-maker...and it looks like a rather poor pairing – sorry God! It seems so wonky, so upside-down and so diametrically opposed to what we know about and what we expect of and what we see in healthy relationships.

It seems that way...until...you realize that's exactly you.

Well, technically, this was a picture of God's relationship with his chosen people, the Israelites, the love of his life. God was quick to make that connection here. He said to Hosea, ***"Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, THOUGH THEY TURN TO OTHER GODS and love the sacred raisin cakes."***

That's not how things were supposed to be. I mean, walk through any period of the Old Testament Israelites, and here was God, this consistent, steadfast, loving, faithful spouse, who was all about those Israelites – providing for all the needs of his chosen people, guiding them all the way to this beautiful gift he had for them (the Promised Land), protecting them against all their enemies. There wasn't anything he wouldn't do for them.

And, then, you had the Israelites, an adulterous people, so unfaithful, willing to just cast aside their loving God and his loving gifts so they could jump in bed with the Baals, the Ashtoreths, and all the other idols and false gods of their enemies. Their relationship with God...so messed up, to the point where they were even eating these sacred raisin cakes, which were offered as a thanksgiving sacrifice to Baal. They did everything they could to break their "marriage" vows to God, to be faithful to him as long as they would live.

And we're not surprised. Go back even further...to Eden. God had given Adam and Eve everything they could have ever wanted. He literally gave them paradise. But Satan came along, his proposition sounded so much more appealing, they ate the forbidden fruit, and, boom, cheated on God. Sin came into the world, and the pattern was set for how any relationship with God from here on out would go.

Right, let's not skirt around the relationship that really matters right now...yours with God. What does it look like?

Perfection...that's what God wants. That's what we've promised to God. Unfaithfulness...that's what we've given to God. We've given broken promises to God. We've broken our relationship with God...because we are broken.

There was this episode of the hit TV show *How I Met Your Mother* where one of the main characters was having trouble with his dating life because every girl he met seemed to be carrying around some kind of baggage (they even had an imaginary suitcase to lug around), hurt from past relationships, bad habits, embarrassing secrets. Whatever it was, everyone had baggage. Everyone was broken in some way.

We are, too. I've started realizing more and more how every person here has something going on...something that ends up impacting their relationship with God – health issues, emotional struggles, family problems, work stress, school trouble, constant schedule conflicts, messed up priorities, pet sins we can't shake, no matter what we do.

Every one's got something...something pulling us away from Jesus, whether it's preventing us from keeping our vows to Jesus to always love and serve Jesus (and so, causing us to sin) or it's pulling us

away from coming home, from being here, being in worship or just being in God's Word – here or at home (which, again, is sin...neglecting God's Word is sin).

We're broken. So, you know what we do? Often, instead of doing something proactive about it – to fix it – like admitting, "I need help" or, even better, falling on our knees before our husband, God, and confessing that brokenness and genuinely repenting of our sins, you know what we tend to do? We treat our brokenness as if it's the worst, and "no one can possibly know what I'm going through, and, if they were me, they'd be angry at God, too. They'd have every legitimate excuse, too, to stay away from God – his house, his Word - which you know where that leads? Right into bed with sin.

It's the quick fix. It feels good to me. I might even try to pass it off as no big deal...it's small and harmless. The truth? That attitude goes to show how broken we really are...because God never sees any sin as harmless. Any sin can separate us from God, because it shows that something else is more important and precious to our hearts than our Father and his will.

And, to be honest, that's what we deserve. Everything said in that imaginary conversation in our introduction should be God speaking to us. We deserve to get kicked out of this relationship with God for good and to be separated from God for an eternity, which would be hell.

That is so messed up. We are so messed up and broken – every one of us. What can we do?

Have you ever seen the cable show *American Pickers*? These two guys, they drive around the country in their van, looking for places where people have been collecting – or even hoarding – junk, for lack of a better term. They're searching for treasures - vintage paraphernalia, children's toys, vehicles, motorcycles, and other collectible items. And on their picks, one of three things usually happens. 1) They'll either say this is junk, or they'll find something once valuable but now beyond repair, and they'll say, "We just can't sell it."

Could you imagine if that were Jesus with us? "You're too broken. I can't fix you. It's off to the junk pile of hell with you." That would be the worst – although well-deserved.

2) They find something valuable, buy it, and then turn right around, stick a price tag on it and try to sell it for a little profit. And that's where I think the quick fixes we seek – often in ourselves or in others – would fit in. Those kinds of fixes, however, are usually only temporary and don't completely solve the underlying problem...for us, sin.

3) They find something they think they can catch a great profit on, and so they put in the huge cost to get it restored. But, it's worth it.

That's Jesus. Because of sin, we're worthless, or at least we should be. We couldn't do anything to save ourselves and improve our broken relationship with God. Stuck – lost - in the junk pile of sin, we needed to be found.

And Jesus came. He was willing to dig through the garbage heap, through cobwebs, through the rat scat so he could find us. You see, Jesus loves every single one of us, broken treasures. He came to fix every broken life. You look through Scripture and find example after example...like Jonah, who ran away from God and God's work, so God in love sent that huge fish to swallow him up, give him the chance to repent and change direction. Zacchaeus, so entrenched in the greedy practice of stealing money under the guise of collecting taxes, but changed by Jesus to be generous with his money because of the

forgiveness he had received. Peter, broken emotionally after denying Jesus in his darkest moments, but restored by his risen Savior and given the charge of feeding Jesus' sheep. The Israelites here who had completely lost their way, taking up a new lover with their idolatry, but God continuing to show and shower his love on them.

And then there's each of us. Jesus took one look at us, saw how broken we were, and said, "You're worth restoring, no matter the cost." Why? Why did the Lord call Israel back and, so to speak, chase after her when she has abandoned him? Why would he ever want to fix us and restore us? His abiding love – his grace - for his people makes him willing to go to all lengths to make them his own again.

And we know those lengths. Have you ever done a restoration job before? I haven't done a complete restoration project, but I've watched enough videos to know that in order to fix and restore something really broken...you have to strip that item down. But, if it's worth it to you, you're going to love the work.

That was Jesus with us. To really fix us, Jesus had to get to the core of our brokenness...sin. And, here's how he did it. He lived. He died. He rose.

Surrounded by temptation, Jesus lived a perfect life unbroken by sin. And then the lengths Jesus went to in order to deal with our sin...was the cross, where his perfect life was exchanged for our broken and sinful lives...where his own Father abandoned him to rot in the punishment of hell we deserved...where his death meant the death of all of our sins, leaving us looking like him. Which we know is how we look right now to God – unbroken, fixed, restored – because Jesus rose, signaling the end of his project...his work of saving you!

You see, in Christ, now, here's what we look like. Paul says in 2 Corinthians, ***"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body" (2 Corinthians 4:7-10).***

In other words, we are these frail human beings, restored from our sinful brokenness by Jesus, but still facing pressure and temptation to crack and break again. But, in Christ, we aren't destroyed. Instead, we are filled with this treasure of the gospel, which renews us and restores us again and again, even when we "prostitute" ourselves and cheat on him again with sin. But his love and his forgiveness puts us firmly into this loving relationship with our loving and faithful God.

And, in that loving relationship with our heavenly Father, what do we do? Our verses say, ***"[They] will return and seek the LORD their God."*** We return to God. We seek the Lord. We continually do that.

When does that happen? Well, where is God found? At home. Here, in God's house, the broken are restored. Here, that happens, every Sunday. Any idea where? The beginning of our worship, we take the time to confess our brokenness (whatever it is), we confess our sins (and I really hope you take that opportunity seriously), and we ask Jesus to have mercy on us in his unfailing love. And then, we get it. The good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection...it immediately restores us. Jesus graciously forgives us. That alone is worth coming home to...again and again!

So, won't you keep coming home? The brokenness won't end...at least not until heaven. But our Lord won't ever stop loving us. He wants us back. So, welcome home. Your "husband" is waiting. And he's ready to restore and love...restore and love. Amen.

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