

Sermon for September 13, 2025 – Pentecost 14

Hosea 3:1-5 EHV

Theme: **The LORD's shocking, seeking, saving love that**

- 1) Redeems,
- 2) Disciplines,
- 3) And delivers unworthy sinners like us.

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."

²So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and nine bushels of barley. ³I 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."

⁴So 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. ⁵Afterward 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.

Few things cut deeper than a spouse's repeated unfaithfulness. It leaves you hurt, angry, betrayed, and broken.

So let me ask: How far would you go to win back a spouse who has cheated on you repeatedly with different people?

Most of us would say, "Win them back? That's crazy—let them go." And that's likely how I would counsel anyone caught in such a painful situation.

But that is not how the LORD deals with His unfaithful people, who cheat on Him over and over again. Today, through the prophet Hosea, the **LORD shows us His shocking, seeking, saving love** — a love that 1) redeems, 2) disciplines, and 3) delivers unworthy sinners like us.

Historical Context

To properly understand our sermon text, we need to review a little history to understand the context under which it was written.

After Solomon died in 931 BC, Israel split into two: the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). The North never had a godly king. Despite the LORD sending prophet after prophet for hundreds of years, the people chose to break their covenant with the LORD to worship the idols of the surrounding nations.

Though the LORD loved Israel like a faithful husband, they continually committed spiritual adultery. So, like a husband forced to let a wayward spouse go, God would send them away by allowing Assyria to conquer Israel and resettle them in different lands. He allowed this — not to destroy them forever, but to discipline them, so they might one day return to Him in repentance and be saved through His promised Saviour.

To drive this home, the LORD called Hosea to live out an enacted parable. He commanded Hosea to marry an unfaithful woman, have children with her, and endure her betrayal. Ultimately, the marriage ended in divorce, yet God commanded Hosea to go and buy her back. Why? To show how the LORD would redeem His wayward people.

Part One: The LORD's love redeems.

Hosea writes:

The LORD said to me, "Go again. Show love to a woman who is loved by another man, a woman who keeps committing adultery."

Notice that the LORD doesn't just tell Hosea to "rescue" his former, unfaithful wife; He commands him to love her even though she didn't deserve it or maybe didn't even want it.

By calling her simply "a woman," God shows that the marriage between her and Hosea was truly broken. Moreover, she continued in her promiscuous ways. Not only was she "loved by another man," but she persisted in her adulteries – enslaved by her sexual desires.

Because she broke the covenant she made with her husband at their wedding, Hosea was under no obligation to do anything for her, and yet God commanded Hosea to:

Show love just as the LORD loves the people of Israel, even though they keep turning to other gods and loving the raisin cakes."

The “raisin cakes” mentioned in our text were a sweet cake that King David once used to celebrate the LORD’s mercy,ⁱ but that were now used by the Israelites to worship idols.ⁱⁱ

Israel had repeatedly broken the covenant they swore to the LORD at Mount Sinai: to be as faithful to Him as He was to them. He was under no obligation to be gracious again. Yet He loved them—and us—so much that He devised a plan to redeem us.”

Yes, we also need redeeming. How so? Because, before God saved us, we also lived according to the passion of our flesh – carrying out its desires instead of God’s. Like ancient Israel, we were unfaithful to the LORD – loving the gods of materialism, pride, and carnal pleasure ahead of the LORD. And aren’t we still tempted to do the same today?

But God, in His mercy, did not want us lost to the everlasting hell we deserve because of our sins. Therefore, He came up with a plan to redeem us.

Hosea continues:

²So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and nine bushels of barley.

The Old Testament law prescribed the value of a slave at 30 pieces of silver,ⁱⁱⁱ which seems to be the total value of what Hosea mentions in our text. The fact that he paid both in silver and barley suggests that Hosea didn’t have the money to redeem her but had to pull together from everything he had to buy her back.

All of this reminds me of how the LORD redeemed us from our slavery to sin, death, and the power of the devil so we might belong to him.^{iv} Hosea emptied his pockets to redeem his bride. Jesus emptied Himself, shedding His blood to redeem you, as the Apostle Peter once wrote:

You were redeemed from your empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, not with things that pass away, such as silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ.^v

Yes, the LORD’s shocking, seeking, saving love moved Him to do the unthinkable: redeem His wayward people at the cost of His Son’s life! Yet He was willing to do that. Why? Because of His great love for us – a love that not only moved Him to redeem His lost people but discipline them for their good.

Part Two: The LORD’s love disciplines.

Hosea continues:

³I 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.”

Because Hosea “purchased” his wife from slavery, she became his bondservant. As such, he placed her under a type of disciplinary “house arrest”. Why? For the same reason you might institutionalize a drug addict: to separate them from the things that trigger their destructive addiction. That is precisely what Hosea was trying to do for his wife – promising, throughout her period of withdrawal, to lovingly provide everything she needed for her body and life.

All this was meant to illustrate the loving discipline the LORD was about to show the Israelites, as Hosea explains:

⁴So 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.

The LORD was about to allow Assyria to not only conquer Israel but also take its people away from the land and assimilate them into other nations. Why? To keep them away from the “drugs” that kept them addicted to their spiritual idolatry.

Yes, for a long time, the northern tribes of Israel would seem lost to the world, but they would not be lost to the LORD. As harsh as their discipline seemed, the LORD meant it for their good. He wanted to humble them so that, over time, they might recognize His love, repent of their pride, and turn to Him in faith.

The same love the LORD showed Israel when disciplining them, He also shows us, as the author of Hebrews explains:

*My son, do not regard the Lord’s discipline lightly,
and do not become weary of his correction.*

*⁶For the Lord disciplines the one whom he loves,
and he corrects every son he accepts.^{vi}*

But to what purpose does God discipline us? To punish us for our sins? No, but as the author of Hebrews states:

God disciplines us for our good, so that we may have a share in his holiness.

¹¹No discipline seems pleasant when it is happening, but painful, yet later it yields a peaceful harvest of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.^{vii}

If you are ever tempted to question why God allows hardships in your life, remember this Bible verse and the answer it provides: God disciplines you out of love, to train you to seek His grace in all things. Yes, the LORD is more than willing to wound you, but only so He can heal you.

[And] God is faithful. He will not allow you to be tested beyond your ability, but when he tests you, he will also bring about the outcome that you are able to bear it.^{viii}

Part Three: The LORD's love delivers.

Even though Israel's discipline seemed harsh and prolonged, its purpose was to prepare them for the coming Christ, as Hosea explains:

⁵Afterward 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.

The mention of David here, who had died centuries earlier, can only refer to Jesus, who would inherit David's throne and rule over God's everlasting kingdom forever.

God's plan was for the northern tribes of Israel to remain scattered among the nations until Jesus came. Then, when the Gospel would reach those nations, they would hear and return to the LORD in penitent fear together with the Gentiles among whom they lived. The LORD would graft every repentant believer in Jesus back into God's kingdom so they could rejoice in His goodness once again, confident that nothing would ever be able to separate them from His love.^{ix}

Now that we have reviewed the LORD's shocking, seeking, saving love as revealed by Hosea, the question arises: What does all this have to do with us?

This: that the same LORD who loved unfaithful Israel mercifully loves you too — even when you wander, doubt, or chase the other 'gods' of your heart. Before you knew Him, when you were still enslaved to the passions of your sinful flesh, He redeemed you through Jesus' death on the cross - forgiving all your sins so you might belong to Him.

He sought you through the preaching of His Word, awakening repentance and faith in your heart through His Gospel in Word and Sacrament. His love for you is the reason you love and trust Him above all things.

However, you have a sinful nature that still longs for the things from which God saved you. For that reason, He disciplines you like a good father disciplines his son – teaching you to avoid the evil that will inevitably destroy you.

But, throughout this discipline, He keeps on loving you – reinforcing His promises and blessing you with everything you need. He promises to keep on doing this until the day He returns to judge the world and take you to be with Him forever in paradise.

Let us, therefore, ever rejoice in the LORD's shocking, seeking, saving love that redeems, disciplines, and delivers unworthy sinners like us. Let us ever turn to Him in repentance and faith – ever seeking His goodness in the Gospel and doing what we can to share His saving love with others. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. 2 Samuel 6:19

ⁱⁱ Cf. Jeremiah 7:17, 44:18

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Exodus 21:32

^{iv} Cf. Romans 6:17-23

^v Cf. 1 Peter 1:18-19

^{vi} Hebrews 12:5-6 EHV

^{vii} Hebrews 12:10-11 EHV

^{viii} 1 Corinthians 10:13 EHV

^{ix} Cf. Romans 8:31-39