

**“Scandalous”
Hosea 1-3
July 11, 2010
The Summit Church (BCAM Campus)**

Slide #1: Danny Franks, Brier Creek AM Campus Pastor

Good morning everybody. In case you're brand new or maybe you've been here for a really long time and just are really incredibly unfocused, my name is Danny and I'm the Campus Pastor here at the Summit's Brier Creek campus.

Most weekends our lead pastor, J.D. Greear will polish off a few Red Bulls and preach from this stage. But from time to time we call up other pastors in other churches and ask them to take Pastor J.D. off our hands for the weekend. That's what happened this weekend and you have me. If that disappoints you, first of all thanks for not telling me that because I struggle with self-esteem issues, and secondly you can probably get in your car and head down to Woodstock, Georgia where he is this morning and catch the last twelve seconds of his sermon. Bring me back some peach cider...I love that stuff.

Today we are taking a quick break from our new sermon series, "This is What the Heart Looks Like." We'll crank that back up next weekend. But today we'll be in the book of Hosea - that's about 50 pages before you hit the New Testament. If you want to go ahead and turn there that'll be fine.

“Scandalous,” Hosea 1-3

I have to tell you that this passage has absolutely wrecked me this week. I was sitting in my Starbucks office on Friday and just re-reading this story for the bazillionth time in preparing for this message, and it got all over me, under me, in me. I got a lump in my throat and big crocodile tears in my eyes because I believe this may be one of the most powerful stories in all of the Old Testament. Yes I know I say that about every story every time I stand up to preach, but I mean it this time.

If you're not familiar with the story of Hosea, let me set it up for you. The timeframe is about 700 years before the birth of Jesus, the setting is the country of Israel. It is a time in Israel's history where the political scene looks like something straight out of Jack Bauer's world...one king is murdered after six months in power, his

successor is on the job for four weeks and then assassinated. All in all, they went through six kings in about 30 years.

But even with the political trouble, it was a time of incredible wealth and luxury. People of the day were relatively affluent. They had become fairly self-reliant and as a nation had largely turned their collective back on God. It wasn't just a passive move away from God, no, many of the Jews known as God's chosen people had deliberately begun to worship Baal, the god of weather who controlled agriculture, rainfall, and their crops. If Baal was happy, Israel was happy. As a matter of fact, their only real worry - the only thing that kept them in a state of anxiety, the thing that actually overshadows this story today - was the very real possibility of invasion and capture by another country.

Now, this is where we have to take off our modern-day thinking cap and start thinking like a 2700 year old Israelite. In 2010 we don't generally get antsy about enemy invaders, do we? It's not like we spend our evenings hunkered down in Durham, worried that those ne'er do wells from Cary are going to cross over 40 and beat us over the heads with their espresso machines and haul us off in their mini vans to do forced labor at one of their six dozen day spas. We just don't worry about things like that. Now if you're talking about people in Roxboro, they have gun racks. Those are the folks you've gotta watch out for.

But because Israel had become indifferent to God, God raised up a group of men called prophets. Prophets were an interesting bunch...they were preachers that God used to call the nation back to faithfulness. Sometimes they were on the same side of the political leaders, sometimes they had to run for their lives because they were speaking out against the leaders. And sometimes God asked them to do really freaky things to make a point.

Enter Hosea. We really know nothing about him except for one little slice of tragedy from his life. This is his story...a real story.

From the beginning, Hosea knew how his story would turn out. Two verses in to the book, and we're told that when the Lord *first* spoke to Hosea, he gave him the punch line. He said, "Hosea, I want you to get married." (So far, so good.) "But I have a particular woman in mind for you. You're going to marry a woman who will be unfaithful. She's going to stray. She will break your heart and make you mad and make you go through torment for years." This is why God will never be allowed to write the script for E-Harmony commercials.

And God showed Hosea a woman named Gomer. Now, if you grew up in church you've likely heard this story before. And this is the point where the pastor would make some reference to Gomer's name, how that's a terrible name for anybody, much less a woman. And you'd expect me to do that, wouldn't you? But I just can't subscribe to that sort of low-budget comedy, so I'm going to keep going without saying a word.

Slide: picture of Gomer Pyle

Not a word.

Here's what's fascinating: when you read the text carefully, it appears that Hosea and Gomer's relationship started off pretty normal. Maybe he knew her from around town. Perhaps they'd played together as children. Maybe he'd seen her in the marketplace and wanted to work up the courage to talk to her. Apparently Gomer was attractive and Hosea took notice of that. And God told Hosea to marry her.

Can you imagine? Put yourself in Hosea's place for a moment. You know Gomer. You've heard from God. And God has clearly told you that she's the woman you're going to marry. But the punch line is still there, and Hosea knows the rest of the story. His wife will eventually be drawn to other men. She'll chase after love and satisfaction in the arms of another, and Hosea is fully aware of that as he buys the ring and prepares his proposal speech. His gift of prophecy had become a curse.

You have to wonder. Did Gomer know? Was her heart predisposed to other men? I have to believe that she didn't. She couldn't have known. Here was a man who loved her. Who was faithful to her. He was in the ministry, so he was flat broke, but he would provide for her and be a good daddy to her children. Saying "yes" to his proposal was the only natural thing to do. And so she did.

And those first years were likely good years. Not long after they were married, Gomer told Hosea he was going to be a dad. Maybe this was the point where Hosea thought he'd heard God wrong. A few years in, and Gomer hadn't strayed. Her heart hadn't gone to another. The text is clear, this child is Hosea's.

He's patting her belly and she's picking out cribs at Babies R Us and he has the cigars all ready, and God speaks again, verse 4: you'll have a son. "Call his name 'Jezreel,' for in just a little while I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel."

If you've had a baby, you know the importance of the baby name. My wife and I spent months deciding what to name our three boys. You know how it is...you practice saying the first name and last name, you check the initials to make sure it won't spell something like "BAT" or "BUM" or "CNN." You come up with every conceivable word that would rhyme with your kid's name because you don't want someone calling him "Danny the Fanny"...you know, in theory.

And then there's the family names. We struggled with this one, because we come from a long line of really bad family names. My dad's dad's name was Eubert Walker Franks. His wife, my grandmother, was Warren Ada. As women's names go, that's just slightly better than Gomer. On the other side I had Reese and Esther. Merriem's grandparents were George and Era and and Lorene, and the best name of all, Jasper Lafayette Greenhaw. So we couldn't win with family names.

Then you have this new trend where people guard their kids' names prior to birth like it's a matter of national security. They won't discuss it, they won't talk about it, they won't budge on any information. We have people like that on our staff. I don't want to name names but the initials are J.D. (oops.) And I think I get it, they don't want to have to defend their choice, but what they don't realize is, I couldn't care any less. I have the unique skill set that no matter what your kid's name is, I can come up with some way to make fun of it. I was that kid on the playground, it was like a defense mechanism for ol' Danny the Fanny.

But Hosea was told to name his kid "Jezreel," which in Hebrew means "scattered." There's another word almost identical in sound and spelling that means, "God perseveres." I'd like to think that Hosea said, "You mean perseveres, right God? Not scattered?" And God said, "No. Jezreel. Scattered like hash browns at Waffle House."

And this is where things begin to get tough at Hosea's house. This is where the prophecy begins to be fulfilled. Verse 6 says that Gomer got pregnant again, except this time, the child wasn't Hosea's. This was a little girl. A girl that should have been the apple of her daddy's eye and one that had her mama's dimples, but when Hosea looked at this child all he could see was a representation of his wife's wandering. God spoke again and said to name her Lo-ruhama, which literally means "No mercy."

And again, Gomer got pregnant, and again, the baby wasn't Hosea's. And this time the name couldn't be more appropriate or

the point more obvious. God said to name him Lo-ammi, which means “Not my people.”

Scattered, No Mercy, and Not My People. Those were the actual names of actual children living in Hosea’s house. Those names were registered at school. Those names were called in the neighborhood when it was time for supper. It’s like naming your kids “Pestilence,” “Salmonella,” and “Eats Crickets in the Back Yard.”

And we don’t know why it happened, or when it happened, but we know that it happened. Gomer strayed. She had a husband who loved her, cared for her, and provided for her, and she sought love in the arms of another. And another. And another. We don’t know if that first time she pursued someone else or let herself be led away by a charmer’s words. We don’t know if Hosea came home one night to find Jezreel at the neighbor’s and a note on the table. We don’t even know if she had the decency to leave the baby and tell her husband. She may have taken Hosea’s own son into her own horrible situation.

And there’s Hosea. Trying to do the right thing. Committed to stay in a loveless marriage. Knowing that he’s been called by God to do the hardest thing a man can do. The people in town were gossiping, his family told him he was crazy for staying, and maybe Gomer himself and begged him to allow a divorce. But he refused. In the midst of the pain and suffering and frustration and fury, he refused. He stayed with his wife, pursued her, loved her anyway, was patient with her and forgave her and worked to restore his marriage.

We can’t forget that this very real story is illustrating a larger reality, and that’s the wayward trajectory of the people of Israel. Chapter 2 is specifically addressing the nation, but using the relationship of Hosea and Gomer as a dramatic backdrop. God’s greatest concern was that his people would return to him. While they were the chosen race, they had fallen into deep sin. They were generations removed from God’s miracles in the wilderness, and they had simply forgotten. They’d wandered. They had no frame of reference for his love.

And there were three particular responses that God had in the midst of Israel’s sin. **Three specific ways God acts towards wayward children:**

1. The first is that he **restrains**. Look at verses 6-7 in chapter 2:

Therefore I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, so that she cannot find her paths. She shall pursue her lovers but not overtake them, and she shall seek them but shall not find them. Then she shall say, “I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better for me than than now.”

That was Gomer’s predicament. I’m sure that the early days of her affair was thrilling. I’m certain that she felt like a new man would bring new change. The proverbial grass was going to be greener. He was going to be everything that she perceived Hosea wasn’t. Maybe he was richer, maybe he was more handsome, maybe he lived in a better section of town, maybe he said all the right words.

But then things got confusing. They got complicated. One lie contributed to another. Her brain was telling her to stay with Hosea but her heart was telling her to hit the road. She was confused, she was desperate. But she hadn’t yet reached the end of her rope. She still had not hit rock bottom. Gomer’s pride wouldn’t let her go back. She couldn’t confess. Not now. Not after all she’s done. She doesn’t want to risk the “I told you so’s” or the rejection or face the shame. So she attempts to stay with her new lover, to stay in the relationship.

And what was true for Gomer was true for Israel. God restrained them. He deliberately blocked their path and placed obstacles in their way to snap them back to attention. But just like Gomer, Israel couldn’t or wouldn’t change. They hadn’t hit the point where the pain of staying the same was greater than the pain of change. And so they continued to pursue after other gods.

The second thing that we see in God’s dealings with wayward children is that he **removes**. Look at verse 9:

Therefore I will take back my grain in its time and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and my flax, which were to cover her nakedness. Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand. And I will put an end to all her mirth, her feasts, her new moons, and her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts. And I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees, of which she said, ‘These are my wages, which my lovers have given me,’ I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall devour them. And I will punish her for the feast days of all the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with

her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the Lord.

You have to imagine that Hosea - the scorned husband - had hit the breaking point. After sleepless nights of wondering if she would come home and making up stories to tell his kids and his neighbors, you know he's had enough. Maybe he considered the legal proceedings for a divorce. Maybe his compassion no longer extend to children who weren't even his and he wanted Gomer to take the younger two and just get on with her life. Perhaps he changed the locks and put her stuff on the curb. And who could blame him? He'd faced the ultimate betrayal and no one in their right mind would tell him he's wrong for wanting a fresh start.

But when it's God who declares a similar fate for the wayward, when it's God who we see declaring that over Israel or over our own lives, we push back against that. We fail to see that God's love isn't just merciful, it's also a disciplinary. And that's what Israel faced. They were now receiving a measure of God's wrath for their sins and their wandering. The days of prosperity are over. Their worship of Baal the god of agriculture has just resulted in a wasteland where their crops had once stood. And they were at a point of desperation.

There's a third act of God in this chapter, and you'd assume that the progression continues downhill. You'd think that after restraining Israel and removing his blessing from Israel, the only thing left is to strike the final blow and annihilate Israel. But as is often the case, what we assume about God is not what we receive from God. Rather than further punishment, we're told that God actually **restores** Israel. Look at v. 14:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. (verse 19) And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord.

The story wasn't over for Gomer, but unfortunately her story got much worse before it got better. Years of wandering, years of affairs had left her broken and destitute. The lavish lifestyle of her first fling had long expired, and as she slept her way from one house to another, from one set of arms to another, from one bed to another, she had no choice but to sell herself into slavery.

We don't know if she was an actual slave or if she became a prostitute, as if there's a difference in those two terms even in

today's world, but we know that Hosea actually purchased his wife. The person who bore his name years before now had to be bought as an object.

In those days when a human was placed on the auction block, the crowd would gather to inspect the goods just like they would inspect a cow or a mule. Do you see her there? Gomer was a shadow of her former self. Eyes sunk in, hair matted, clothes ragged, hungry, dirty, smelly. And one lowlife after another walked by and eyed her up and down, leered at her, made vulgar comments toward her, and she eyed them, too, as the next person that she'd be indebted to.

And the bidding started. Three shekels of silver. Five. Eight. Eleven. She was so used, so abused, that the price didn't climb to even half of what a common slave would go for in those days. Gomer was listless, numb, probably trying desperately to ignore the desperation she was in.

And then, from the back of the crowd, a voice. The voice. It was a voice that she hadn't heard for years. A voice she'd long since silenced. Maybe a voice she'd dreamed about, but now it was reality. It was the voice of her husband, coming to rescue her out of her slavery.

You know the story. Hosea won the bid. He pushed his way through the crowd to claim his bride. I can imagine that he'd brought with him her clothes from home. That familiar feel, the familiar smell. He tenderly took her by the hand and led her off the auction block, and helped her away from the stare of the crowd. And in a little alleyway behind a building, he brushed back her greasy hair and looked into those hollow eyes, and he began the work of restoration in his wife.

That's the story of Hosea and Gomer. And I don't know how you typically respond when you're reading scripture, but I'll tell you how I respond. I tend to identify myself with a character in the story. And I'll tell you this: I almost always identify myself with the hero. I'm the patient one that's have to suffer through someone else's sin. I'm the gracious one that's forgiving when I'm wronged. I'm the kind one that goes out of his way to serve.

But I hope you've seen yourself in a different light in this story. In case you've missed it, we have no right or reason to compare ourselves with Hosea. We've talked about his kids' names, but I didn't tell you that his name means "salvation." Hosea is a derivative of the Hebrew name "Joshua." There's another

derivative of “Joshua,” and that’s “Jesus.” Hosea *means* salvation, Jesus *is* salvation. So in this story, if you haven’t picked it up yet, you’re not Hosea, and neither am I. We are all Gomer. Shazam.

The truth this morning is that some of you don’t need me to draw that connection that you’re Gomer. You already know it. You feel it. You’ve lived her story. Maybe not through physical betrayal to a spouse, but through spiritual betrayal to God. You’ve run. You’ve pushed away. And now you’re on the auction block, a shadow of who you used to be. And you don’t know if you can actually come back.

I’ve got good news, you can come back, and it’s even better than you’ve imagined. Three very quick things I want you to see. The first is our **identity**. Not only are we represented by Gomer, but we are characterized by being **faithless**. **Romans 3:10-12**, I’ll put it up on the screen, says,

None is righteous, no, not one. Not one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

There’s nothing in us that naturally pursues faithfulness. As the hymn says, we are prone to wander, prone to leave the God we profess to love. And while we want to look just like a faithful husband the fact is that we are a wandering whore. We drift. We deliberately pursue our own way and forsake God’s way.

The good news is that God has given us a new identity. No matter how we view ourselves and no matter what may be true about our past, he gives us a new reality. He helps us down from the auction block, he dresses us in new clothes, he speaks tenderly to us, and he calls us his own.

Some of you need to hear this: *you are not what you did*. If you have trusted in Christ as your savior, if his righteousness has replaced your unrighteousness, you’re not an adulterer. You’re not an embezzler. You’re not a drunk or an addict or an outcast or a failure. His identity is your identity. That’s the truth of the gospel, and that’s the hope for our lives.

The second thing we see is our **reality**. The reality is that we are **undeserving**. Again in Romans, Paul says that

While we were still weak. At the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die –

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Do you see that? While you were still in the arms of another lover. While I was still playing the whore. While we all were faithless and hopeless, Jesus died for us. There was nothing we could do to earn it because Romans says we don’t even deserve it. Paul makes the point that no one in their right mind lays down their life for another. It’s just not what we see in today’s society.

But because *we’ve* been loved with such a great love, our only natural response is to love others as well. If there is a point in this story where we can compare ourselves to Hosea, it is this: we’re called to love people regardless of how they love us in return. For months now we’ve been telling you about ServeRDU and encouraging you to take a morning or day or an entire week off of work and serve the underserved in our community. And if you’re really really honest, the reason that you haven’t signed up yet is not because you’re too busy or you don’t have enough skills, the reason is that you don’t see people the way Jesus sees people.

We’re going to be serving some people this week that don’t deserve our service. They’re not worthy of our love and our resources. They’ll take from our hands and then cuss our backs. Some will take advantage of us. Some will squander what we give them. Some won’t appreciate a single thing we do, and they just don’t deserve to have someone do something nice for them.

But the truth is, you don’t either. And neither do I. This is not a statement about one particular class of people in our culture, this is a statement about people. You are unworthy of the love of Christ. You don’t deserve the great exchange he provided. You did nothing to earn it and if the truth is told most of your current actions don’t reflect it.

But that is what compels us to serve. Jesus served us by coming to earth and dying for us. We can certainly serve others by expressing his love in a practical way.

We don’t always see a happy ending to our ServeRDU stories. But again, we don’t do it for personal recognition or corporate gain, we do it because it’s what God has called us to do. We can never presume what God is doing in the middle of someone’s story.

And the reason that we do those things is very biblical and very tangible. It has to do with our **ability**, which is **reconciliation**. This is what we’re told in 2 Corinthians:

All of this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

Did you catch that? As a Christ-follower, you actually have the ability to reconcile people back to God. Don't be misled: Jesus is the one who reconciles. But we have the *ministry* of reconciliation. We have the ability and the calling to be Jesus with skin on, to demonstrate grace and mercy and extravagant love to our city and ask nothing in return except a hope that they too would be reconciled to God through Jesus.

It's what Jeremiah points to in Jeremiah 29:7 where he says **Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for it its welfare you will find your welfare.**

The amazing thing about this verse is that it's addressed to possibly the children and definitely the grandchildren of those that lived in Hosea's day. Israel is now in exile, and Jeremiah's mandate is that even though they are in far from an ideal setting, their calling is not to build up comfort for themselves, but to seek the peace of the city where they live.

Our identity is faithlessness, but Jesus has been faithful to us. Our reality is that we're undeserving, but Jesus gave us what we do not deserve. Our ability is reconciliation, because Jesus has reconciled a wandering adulterer to a holy God. Will you bow your heads?

There's no doubt in my mind that for every one of us, Gomer's story is our story. We've all wandered. We've all strayed. And for all of us, restoration is possible.

Then there are those who are confident that you've been restored, but you're doing nothing to reconcile others to God. You've squandered opportunities to be Hosea, to love when you get nothing in return, to draw people back to God.

This morning, the invitation is simple: return to God, reconcile others to him. You return to God by trusting Jesus as the only one who can forgive you of your sins. You reconcile others by looking for practical ways to be Jesus with skin on.

Prayer...