
Prayers

To God

Weekly theme: God's provision

Give thanks to God for His amazing provision for you this very day. Give thanks as you look at your clothes, your food, transport, your health, and every significant feature of your life.

For myself

Pray quietly, and if necessary, in silence. Let God speak to you, and listen for His words.

For others

Dear Jesus, we live in a world where enormous sums of money are spent on sport, and even if it is for the enjoyment of many, it does not liberate the poor or overcome their dire problems. Give us the courage to speak out for the poor and do everything we can to make a fair world for all people to enjoy, sport and all. AMEN

Meditation

Find beauty in companionship,
For Jesus is our friend and respects our love:

Find beauty in simply duties,
For Christ empowers us all to do good:

Find beauty in helping the poor
For the Son of God brought hope to the world:

Find beauty in doing what is right,
For the Spirit creates the fruit of the Spirit within:

Find beauty in working with others
For the Father loves the unity of His people:

Find beauty in overcoming problems
For the Lord our God is victorious over all evil:

Find beauty is resting from all you do
For God Himself rested, and loves the Sabbath.

Bible Passage

Hosea 2:16-23

¹⁶ The Lord declares,

'In that day, you will call me "my husband"; and you will no longer call me "my master". ¹⁷ I will remove the names of the Ba'als from her lips, and they will no longer be remembered by name.

¹⁸ In that day I will make a covenant with you and with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures of the earth. I will abolish bow, sword and battle from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. ¹⁹ I will make a marriage between you and me forever; my marriage to you will be made in righteousness, in justice, in love, and in compassion. ²⁰ My marriage to you will be made in faithfulness, and then you will know the LORD.

²¹ The Lord declares,

'In that day I will give an answer, I will answer to the skies, and they will answer to the earth; ²² and the earth will answer to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will answer to Jezreel. ²³ I will sow her for myself in the land; I will show mercy to "No Mercy", and I will say to "Not my people", "You are my people"; and they will say, "You are my God."

Review

The transformation is complete in these last verses of chapter 2 of Hosea. We began reeling from the painful story of Hosea's disastrous marriage to the adulterous Gomer, in chapter 1, and we end chapter 2 with Hosea prophesying directly from his experience. By a supernatural work of grace, this amazing man has perceived connection between his own experience and God's work within the world, and declares it unashamedly. Would that more of God's people do the same today.

As we have seen already in chapter 2, at the heart of Hosea's prophecy lies the truth about a God of love, a love that has been rejected that will never give up, and constantly seeks to forgive, to be renewed, and be reborn. Hosea therefore speaks of God's anger at His people Israel (2:9-13), but eventually turns everything around to confirm His earnest love (2:14,15). The passage we have read today describes the outpouring of God's heart of love for His people, and contains an abundance of promises of love, provision, transformation and restoration.

Even though each section of this passage begins with the famous prophetic words '*the Lord declares*' (2:16, 21), what is written here comes clearly from Hosea's heart. We might think that true prophetic words come as it were from heaven, untainted by worldly thoughts and ideas. In truth, we are shown here by this scripture that God uses human emotions and events of everyday life, albeit dramatic ones, to drive his Word. In prophecy, God uses the experience of the prophet to reveal his inner heart. This is remarkable, and it is something we do well to remember, coming as it does from one of the first prophets of Israel whose words were written down to provide God's people with a scriptural book.

Now if we go back to the first chapter of Hosea, we found prophecies there derived from the names of Hosea's first son '*Jezreel*' (1:4,5) and of Gomer's two subsequent children '*No-mercy*' and '*Not-my people*' (1:7,9-11). In the midst of these, the Lord promises that He will

do something one day to deal with the unfaithfulness of Israel, declaring He will do it *'on that day'* (1:5, see also *'the day'* in 1:11). We may not have thought too much about this phrase when we read it, but if we stop for a moment, we will realise that this is an important phase. By the time of Jesus, the words *'on that day'* refer to Christ's coming again and God's eternal judgement. Now, here in the passage we have read today, the three prophecies delivered by Hosea each begin with these words (2:16, 18, 21). What do they mean here in Hosea?

Hosea is one of the earliest of the prophets, and this is therefore the first instance of the use of this phrase in the Bible. Here, it tells us that God has a plan to deal with unfaithful Israel, and it will come about on a certain day and at a certain time. There is no hint here of any *'apocalyptic'* vision of the end of all things, only that the Lord has promised to do what He says, and he will unfailingly do what He has said, *'on that day'*, meaning only, when it happens. This is not to say that these words do not have added meaning later on in script, but we must be careful not to read this back into the earliest use of the phrase, unless there is good reason.

In the first prophecy (2:16,17), the Lord will remove all the forms of temptation that have caused Israel to sin. The Ba'als have proved to be too great an attraction for the Israelites, and they are unable to draw back from idolatry. The state of Israel illustrates what Paul says in Romans, roughly quoting Psalm 14 (53) and Isaiah 59:7,8

'All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no-one who does good, not even one.' (Romans 3:12)

Hosea's insistence that God will have to remove the Ba'als (2:16,17) and this is a fundamentally true observation, which distinguishes Hosea's words as genuine prophecy. He states the basic scriptural theme; sin cannot be dealt with by those who have succumbed to its power; God alone must do the work.

In the second prophecy (2:18-20), the Lord declares that He will remake His marriage agreement or *'covenant'* with Israel. More than that, He says this new covenant will be the world over and all its creatures, and it will be distinguished by a lack of violence (2:18). God's prompting has led Hosea here to speak of a truth beyond his understanding, for although Hosea does not say much more about this, other prophets such as Isaiah substantially develop the theme of God's purpose to renew the whole earth (e.g. Isaiah 35).

The rest of this prophecy is the first time in Scripture that God described his relationship with Israel as like a marriage (2:19). Yet again, this theme is important for the whole of Scripture, for in the New Testament, Jesus picks it up when he describes His coming again is like a heavenly banquet (Matt 22:2, Luke 12:36 etc.). It is hard to convey the power of this ancient idea in English, because of the different ways by which marriages were arranged in ancient times. But this prophecy is hopefully clear that God alone will sort out this marriage; He will pay the *'bride price'* and establish it in *'justice, in love, and in compassion'* (2:19). Hosea's remarkable phraseology reveals the grace of God; and remember, it was spoken centuries before the New Testament theology of grace or Paul's explanation of the price paid by Christ for all on the Cross (see 1 Cor 6:20, 7:23). This prophecy speaks to the heart of the Christian Gospel, and reaches far beyond the days of the man who spoke them.

The third prophecy (2:21-23) continues to reveal yet more. In visionary words, Hosea shows an extraordinary turn of phrase, conveying the idea of the questions and responses lying at the heart of any marriage liturgy today (which asks, *'will you?'* and invites the response, *'I Will'*). The Lord will call all creation to witness and confirm the new marriage covenant that gives His love to His people, and the earth will reply to confirm it (2:21,22)! When the Lord receives His response, then a new work of grace will begin, a new *'sowing'*, (*'Jezreel'*, the name of Hosea's first child - 1:4,5). God's love will then be poured out and He will change *'No mercy'* back to *'mercy'*, and He will return those who are *'not my people'* back to *'my people'* (2:23).

This is undeserved and superabundant love, and the prophet has revealed a richness to God's feelings and attitude that was never previously known. It hardly needs us to comment further to draw out the connections between these prophecies and the Gospel message. Sometimes, we read prophecies in the Old Testament and feel rather underwhelmed, and we struggle to find connections with the Gospel we know and love. This is not such a passage!

Discipleship

Application

God's undeserved and superabundant love

It takes a little getting used to, but this prophecy is worthy of our very careful attention. The love of God lies at the very heart of the Christian Gospel, and although we have plenty of New Testament texts about this from which to draw, I suggest that our passage today should be studied by anyone who wants to preach on the subject. Its most profound revelations are the limitless and undeserved love of God which surpasses judgement, and also the connection between God's grace and the world at large. The first is a fundamental tenet of the Gospel of salvation, but the second is a reminder that we cannot separate our faith from the physical world around us. The practice of our religion can never be a cerebral matter, it is fundamentally practical, and the ultimate consequences of our faith are universal.

Prophetic words

Sometimes, especially when preaching, I find myself saying things that I am not sure I fully understand at the time. So I read these words today wondering whether Hosea really understood what he was saying, or whether he was willing to sit lightly to his feelings and just get on with delivering God's word? Did he let the Lord 'take him away' in spiritual dreams and visions? Or was he so distraught by his own circumstances that he was unable to see the full consequences of what he was saying? One thing is sure; these words are powerful beyond anyone's comprehension, even today. The more we read them, the more they reveal to us God's amazing, abundant and ultimately unfathomable love. This is certainly a remarkable prophetic Word.

Ideas for what to do

- If possible, get hold of a set of words used for a service of marriage. You can find these on the internet under the resources of a major denomination such as the Church of England, or you can find out what is used in your own church. Have a good look at this and examine the connections between the marriage service and the Gospel.
- If you are married, talk with your spouse about how marriage reflects the relationship we may have with the Lord. If you are not, then pray about this or explore the idea further within Scripture.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What are the connections between this passage of Scripture and the Gospel of Christ we find in the New Testament?

2. How does the idea of marriage help us understand God's relationship with His people today, and is 2:18-20 helpful to us now?
3. What do verses 21 to 23 mean to us today, why does the prophet speak about the skies, the earth, and the grain (etc.) answering to one another? What does this mean?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus; draw me to Your perfect love, and as I seek to be like You, keep me mindful of my humanity; of where I have come from, as well as where I am going. May I learn from Your powerful and compassionate love how I can remain true to my calling throughout my life. Through Jesus Christ I pray; AMEN
