

Sermon Title: THE PURCHASE OF LIFE (Jesus in the Prophets)

Sermon Text: Hosea 3

Date: January 17, 2016 (New Beginnings Baptist)

Introduction

a. Intro to the Message

James Montgomery Boice was the pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. He is known for his commitment to the Word of God and for His refusal to bend to the blatant liberalism of his day, defending the inerrancy of Scripture until he took his last breath. He was, and continues to be to this day, heard on the radio program called The Bible Study Hour. He wrote several books on doctrine and discipleship and even the difficult texts and issues found in the Bible. He was a sought after Bible teacher, teaching God's Word all around the world. From the wealth of His teaching and preaching he published commentaries on 24 books of the Bible, as well as several topical books on doctrines from the Bible. If you have never heard of J.M. Boice, it is my privilege to be the one to introduce you to this man of God who went home to be the Lord at the turn of the millennium. And if you know one thing about this man, I pray it is His commitment to the Word of God. He knew the Word of God, believed the Word of God, preached the Word of God, and as was said of John Bunyan, I think we could safely say of Boice that if you had pricked his arm he would bleed the Word of God. And this is what this man of the Word says about the text I have chosen to preach on for my last session with you: "The third chapter of Hosea is, in my judgement, the greatest chapter in the Bible." I must say that when I first read that I was a bit taken aback, I mean really, the greatest chapter in the Bible??? But then I began to work on the text, examine the text, exegete and apply the text and prepare a sermon on the text, and I began to resonate with Boice's words. So, we have spent time in the books of the law, learning about the beginning of life in Genesis. We have spent time in the writings, learning about the meaning of life in Ecclesiastes. That leaves only one last section of the Old Testament to preach Christ from, and it is the prophets. And I cannot think of a better place to go then to what James Boice calls the greatest chapter of the Bible, found in Hosea, where we will learn about the purchase of life.

Text: Hosea 3

b. Intro to the Text (v. 2)

So there is one word in our text that requires some work before we go any further, and it is the word "*again*." In other words, if you were to open your Bible to Hosea 3 and read just this chapter several questions would arise that would have to be answered if you were to understand and apply what you read. Most importantly, if Hosea is commanded to "*Go again, love an ... adulteress*" (v.1), you would need to know about the first time he was commanded to go, and for that you would return to the beginning of Hosea's prophecy. There he is instructed by the Lord to

marry a promiscuous woman, or as the ESV bluntly puts it, “*a wife of whoredom*” (**Hosea 1:2**). Now I do not think this means that he was to marry a woman who was already promiscuous or who was a prostitute prior to marriage, but rather that he was to marry a woman who after marrying would become promiscuous and violate the 7th commandment. And as a prophet of God, after receiving instruction from God, that is exactly what Hosea did, he went out and made Gomer his wife. Now with all this in mind, as we come to chapter 3 we must plainly understand that at this point Gomer was no longer to BECOME unfaithful; instead, now she HAD BEEN and WAS BEING unfaithful to her husband. As Hosea put it in chapter two, his wife “*played the whore*” and “*acted shamefully*” (**Hosea 2:5**). The prophet’s bride “Went after her lovers and forgot” about her husband (**Hosea 2:13**). The vows that she spoke so many years ago had long disappeared from her memory. The commitment that she pledged to her husband had vanished like a mist into the wind. Two of the three children she bore, whether they were her husband’s or not, were a constant reminder to Hosea of the adulterous ways of the wife to whom he had committed himself to so many years ago. A life of adultery and years of unfaithfulness from a whore of a wife had led to a relationship between Gomer and Hosea that most would think was broken beyond repair. This brings us to our text for this morning where the love of a husband teaches us not just about the love of a husband but more importantly about the love of God and his great plan of redemption. You see, in the life of Hosea and Gomer, Hosea represents God and Gomer represents Israel. Gomer’s actions then teach us about the history of Israel’s unfaithfulness to God, while Hosea’s actions will teach us about the love of God for His people. And while I will unpack this text by focusing on just three things about God’s love that we must learn, as you will likely see, every word of this text is dripping with the love of God for His people. That said; my prayer is that the three things you will discover this morning about the love of God are that it is (1) Unconditional; (2) Unrelenting; and (3) Unquenchable.

1. Unconditional Love (v. 1)

a. Israel’s Love

So we pick up the story with God instructing Hosea to go and love his wife again. But where was she when he was instructed to do so. Had she come to the end of her adulterous ways? Had she realized the futility of her unfaithfulness to her husband? Had she crawled back to Hosea begging him to take her back? Did she even want to work at the relationship with her husband? Well, it most assuredly does not seem so. First of all, notice that when God gives Hosea his instructions here he refers to Gomer not as his wife. Instead He says: “*love a woman*” (**v.1**). This is not because she was not technically his wife at the moment but that she had given up the right to be called his wife. She had violated the covenant she made with her husband. Through her unfaithfulness she had left the protective and caring commitment of her husband. Instead of keeping herself for her husband she had shared her love with many men. In our text, it says that when Hosea was instructed to go love her again she was “*loved by another man*” (**v. 1**). This is why I say she shared her love with other men, though it was not really about love at all, rather it was about sex. It might be better to say she shared her bed rather than her love, for concerning

this phrase, “*loved by another man*” commentator Duane Garrett says “it simply means that she had sexual encounters with other men.”¹ This was what Gomer was doing when Hosea was to love her again, she was being unfaithful. And to be absolutely clear with Hosea’s audience he states point blank how this relates to Israel, for when God determined to love the people of Israel they were sharing their bed with idols. Instead of worshipping ONLY God they were worshipping God AND idols. As Hosea puts it, instead of turning only to God, they “*turn[ed] to other gods*” (v.1), which of course were “*not gods at all*” (**Jeremiah 16:20, NET**). Israel had forgotten the commitment they made with God. They had forgotten that they had pledged their obedience to God. They had forgotten that because God had made them His people they were to be faithful to Him and worship Him only (**Exodus 19:4-5**). They were playing fast and loose with God, and it was at that very point that God loved them. They were not in the business of loving God when God loved them. Not at all. Just look at what Hosea contrasts in this verse, namely that like Hosea was to love his unfaithful wife who was in the business of “*loving*” other men, likewise God would love Israel while Israel “*love[d] cakes of raisins*” (v. 1). Raisin cakes? Now I have to say that I love Hosea’s choice of words here. He could have said that they were turning to idols and loving idols, but instead he draws out one element of idol worship: raisin cakes. Now there is more than one explanation of exactly what part raisin cakes played in the idol worship of the pagan religions of that day, but I think regardless of what part it played, Hosea is drawing out the absurdity and foolishness of their idol worship. In other words, what I believe he is trying to say is that the Israelites have the love of God—the eternal creator, sustainer and ruler of the universe—upon them and instead of loving Him they love raisin cakes. Raisin cakes???? I mean seriously, how foolish could a person be to love baked goods rather than God. But have things really changed? Lest we miss the point, we might not put raisin cakes before God, but there are a host of things as equally unworthy of our worship that we put before God. Gomer not only represents Israel, she represents us too. And likewise, lest we think the Israelites are such a fickle and faithless people, Paul tells us that what happened with them is to be a lesson to us (**1 Cor 10:6**). In other words, we best not think we are not like them, for we are. It may not be raisin cakes that we chase after, but there are a host of things which are equally foolish that we chase after in a way we ought not to—whether it be a sports team, a leisure activity, a big bank account, a spouse, our children or any number of other things. Whatever we worship that isn’t God is absolutely and completely unworthy of our worship because all our worship is due to God, every last drop. Moses made this abundantly clear when he said:

“you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God”
(**Exodus 34:14**).

Likewise, the Psalmist said it like this:

“For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens” (**Psalms 96:4-5**).

¹ Garrett, Duane A. Hosea, Joel (NAC), Broadman and Holman, 1997.

May we learn both from Gomer and Israel, the futility of worshiping idols. May we understand the foolishness of loving things or people or places or activities more than God. May we grasp the depth of our sin and unfaithfulness to God and throw ourselves at His feet to worship Him and Him alone for He alone is worthy. But the story does not end with Gomer's unfaithfulness.

b. God's Love

Furthermore, neither Gomer nor Israel's faithlessness is the highlight of this text; rather, the highlight of this text is the faithfulness and love of God. You see, as Gomer represents the people of God, Hosea represents God. And here Hosea is told to go and love his wife again which I think teaches something about the love of God for His people that is overwhelming, namely, that it is unconditional. In other words, just as Hosea, the obedient prophet of God, was determined to love his wife again, God was determined to love His people regardless of their faithlessness. This is the beauty of God's love, that before His people even existed He determined to put His love on them, as Paul says in Ephesians:

"[God] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph 1:4-6a).

Not just before we existed, but before the world existed God determined to love us. And make no mistake, as He made clear to the people of Israel (**Deut 7:7**), God did not determine to love us because we are lovely, or because we deserved it, or because of our faithfulness. No, God determined to love His people for one reason: for His own glory (**Isaiah 43:7**). May we rejoice today that God's love for us is not dependant on our faithfulness. May we rejoice that God's steadfast love endures forever. May we rejoice and worship God today because He chose us to be His people because of His unconditional love, a lesson learned from the life of Hosea and Gomer. But the story of Hosea and Gomer continues, for Hosea has received his marching orders, now we discover what he did, and when we do we discover yet something else about God's love for His people.

2. Unrelenting Love (vv. 2-3)

Hosea has been instructed to go again and love Gomer, yet it would not be quite as easy as just going and getting her. As we learn in verse two of our text, Hosea would have to go and buy his wife back. His own wife. He had to buy her back. He had chosen her, at the instruction of God almighty, among all women to be his. He had determined to love her. He had protected her and provided for her every need. He had even cared for her children, some who likely were not even his. And what does she do to repay him for such kindness? She shares the most precious gift she has to give to her husband, herself, with other men. God had made plain how wrong what Gomer did was when He said in no uncertain terms: *"You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14)*. He had demonstrated how serious her crimes were when He provided the punishment for adultery: death (**Deut 22:22**). But Gomer did not face the punishment prescribed by God for her adultery. Instead, through her unfaithfulness to her husband she ended up being sold into slavery.

We do not know the exact details of how Gomer ended up becoming a slave, but we do know that this demonstrates that she had fallen on hard times. She could not pay her bills. She could not make enough money to live. She had nowhere to turn and thus had become someone's property. She walked out on her husband, she shared her bed with other men, and she was sold into slavery and would now go to the highest bidder. And as was the practice of that day, so the buyer knew what he was getting, and to shame the slave, she was led like an animal in front of the crowd and stripped (**Hosea 2:3**). And the bidding began. The standard price for a slave was 30 shekels (**Exodus 21:32**), but this slave had been used and abused and so I imagine the auctioneer would have begun low with her on the block: "Do I hear 5 shekels, will someone pay five shekels for this worn out adulteress? I see the man in the third row, I have five shekels. Will someone pay ten shekels, she can be of some use to you I am sure, will someone pay 10 shekels? I have ten shekels from the man to my left. What about twelve shekels, do I hear twelve shekels? A bargain for sure, at less than half the price of your average slave" "Yes, twelve shekels," comes a voice from the crowd. And so the auctioneer tries one more time to raise the price, asking if someone will bid 13 shekels. But just when everyone present thinks the bidding has likely come to an end, a voice comes from the back of the crowd, a voice that shouts in a determined tone "*fifteen shekels of silver ... and a homer and [a half] of barley*" (**v.2**). And at that, the auctioneer knows he will get no higher price for the whore so the gavel slams down and the words ring through the crowd: "sold for 15 shekels." And there stands Gomer in the midst of this travesty that is her life filled with shame and wondering who she has become the property of ... when through the crowd she sees that familiar face again. It is Hosea ... her husband. I imagine that at this point she might be concerned with what will now become of her. He could have bought her to demand she pay the penalty due her for adultery. He could have bought her to make her life even more miserable, repaying her for her unfaithfulness. But no, instead he walked to the front and covered her up and took her home to be his wife again. And these were the tender words he spoke to her: "*And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you"*" (**v. 3**). Now such love could be called many things: extravagant, outrageous, maybe to some even unbelievable. But I think the word that best describes God's love for His people, as demonstrated in Hosea's actions is unrelenting. God had set His love on His people, choosing them to be His own according to His unconditional love. And though Israel would tempt Him to take His love away, He would not. Just read the book of Judges and you will see a pattern of Israel's unfaithfulness and idolatry followed by God's love. God just will not relent. He will not give up on His people. Prophet after prophet He sends to them. Warning upon warning, calling His people to repent and turn to Him. From the first verse in the Bible to the last, over and over again, we read about God's unrelenting love. It was the 19th century hymn writer, George Matheson, who described God's love so well when he wrote the song: "O Love that will not let me go." In other words, if there is one thing that God's people do not need to worry about, it is whether God will stop loving them or not. He won't. He can't. His love for you is unrelenting. There is a lot of uncertainty in this world. There is much which we cannot be sure of concerning

the future, but when you put your head down on the pillow every night, if you are a child of God you can be sure that when you awake in the morning, if you awake in the morning, God will still love you. When you are unfaithful, God will still love you. When you sin and worship idols, God will love you. And when you are faithful to Him and repent of your sins and when you trust in Him and when you worship Him, He will love you. Reflecting on this wonderful truth Paul says:

“For I am persuaded that not even death or life, angels or rulers, things present or things to come, hostile powers, height or depth, or any other created thing will have the power to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!” (Romans 8:38-39).

That is God’s love for His people, and we see it in Hosea’s love for his unfaithful wife. It is unrelenting love.

3. God’s Unquenchable Love (vv. 4-5)

But there is yet one last thing we learn about God’s love, and as the story of Hosea and Gomer fades into the background of this text this last lesson we learn directly from God’s relationship with His people. In the context of a sermon on God’s love, it is important that we recognize that God’s love does not mean that His people are not punished for their sin. In fact, it is God’s love that leads Him to discipline His children and it is God’s love that people should be grateful for when they are disciplined (**Hebrews 12:6-7**). When it concerned the Israelites the punishment they would face was that they would be attacked by the Assyrians and would be taken into exile, and as Hosea puts it, when that happened: *“the children of Israel [...] dwell[ed] many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods” (v.4)*. In other words, they would be without a king, they would be without a temple for worship, and they would be without their idols. In short, they would lose their identity, they would lose all they had, and they would lose their freedom. But this was not where Israel would remain, not by a long shot. And the reason that Israel would not remain without a king and without possessions, identity and freedom is because of the unquenchable love of God. In other words, God had a plan for His people and that plan involved total restoration and that plan would be accomplished. As Hosea puts it: *“Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days” (v. 5)*. So, Israel would turn back to God, but when? Has it happened yet? I think not, but I think it is yet to come, for Paul mentions this return of Israel to God in Romans 11 when he says:

“Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, “The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”; “and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins”
(Romans 11:25-27).

Now I confess that I am not sure exactly what Paul means when He says a day is coming when *“all Israel will be saved,”* but I do know that it must mean that in some way a number of

Israelites will return to the Lord, and I think that largely due in part to verse five of Hosea, along with other places in the Old Testament (eg. **Isaiah 27:9; 59:20; Jer 31:33**). But I do not think that Israel will be separate from Gentiles, rather I think that as Israel returns to the Lord, as Paul says they will be “*grafted back in*” (**Romans 11:24**), and God’s people will continue as one people, Jew and Gentile. And more importantly than that I also know who will be the king of God’s people at that time. It will be the same as the king of God’s people today, and Hosea makes clear when he says who Israel will return to, namely, “*David their king.*” Now when the Israelites heard this they were not thinking that David would come back from the dead to be their king again. No, they thought that there would be a descendant of David who would take the throne again. And you know what? That is what happened. It did not happen in Hosea’s day. It did not happen before the close of the Old Testament. But after 400 years of silence after the last prophecy, a son was born, and do you know the first thing Matthew tells us about this son was: that he was “*Jesus Christ, the son of David*” (**Matthew 1:1**). Or as the apostle John records Jesus’ very words after he has lived, died, risen and is about to return:

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star” (**Revelation 22:16**).

In other words, Jesus is the one who sits on the throne of David and rules over the people of God for all eternity. Not just Jews, and not just Gentiles, but people from “*every tribe and language and people and nation*” (**Rev 5:9**). This is the plan God has for His people, that Jesus will reign over His people now and for all eternity. And nothing can stop God’s plan to create, save and prepare a people for His glory. This is what He is doing now and what He has been doing throughout all history, making a people for Himself. No matter how bad things get, no matter if we lose hope from time to time, no matter who tries to get in the way of God’s plan, it will come to be, and it will come to be because of God’s unquenchable love.

Conclusion

But how exactly will that plan be worked out? Well, it began before the foundations of the world when because of His unconditional love God chose to save a people, consisting of both Jew and Gentile, for His own glory. This was not dependant on the faithfulness or the greatness of His people. Such people, like you and me, were lost, sold into slavery to our sin. We were without hope and dead in our sins. We ran after whatever we thought would satisfy our inner longings. We were friends of the world and enemies of God and we would have been lucky if someone would have paid fifteen shekels for our souls. But because of God’s unrelenting love He paid far more than that. He paid for us with the blood of His son. As Peter put it, we

“were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot” (**1 Peter 1:18-19**).

In the life of Hosea and Gomer, we are Gomer, and because of our sin we deserve nothing short of death and an eternity in hell away from the presence of God. But God would not leave us on

the auction block, enslaved by our sins. Instead, He would take on flesh, become a man, live a perfect life, give His life, be buried and rise from the dead to conquer death and hell. Have you ever wondered why God did all that for you? Have you ever wondered why God saved you when you were so unworthy of His love? Have you ever wondered why He still loves you? It is because when it concerns His people, His love is unrelenting and unquenchable. And His love had a purpose, to make and restore a people for His glory, and because of God's love that purpose would be fulfilled. That purpose and plan includes heaven and earth being recreated and becoming one, a place where His people will no longer struggle with sin any longer nor experience pain and suffering, but instead will experience perfect fellowship with God. As Christians we call that heaven. But until then, and in light of God's love for us, let us love Him in return. Like Paul put it in his letter to Titus, Jesus

“gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14).

Is there anything you would not do for your Lord? Is there anything or anyone else worthy of your worship? Is there anyone else whose love is unconditional, unrelenting and unquenchable? Is there any other king worthy of your service besides Jesus? Repent of your sin and trust Him. Turn from chasing after the things of the world and follow Him. Get rid of your idols and worship the only one worthy of your worship: His love is unconditional, unrelenting and unquenchable. Which brings us to the end of our message. But if you would afford me just one more second, I would like to return to where we began, at Boice's assertion that the text we have discussed is the greatest chapter in the Bible. And while I trust you now see why he said that, you must know that I only included half of the quote at the beginning of the sermon. Yet now that we have come to the end I must give BOICE his due and finish the quote: "This third chapter of Hosea is, in my judgement, the greatest chapter in the Bible, because it portrays the greatest story in the Bible—the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for His people—in the most concise and poignant form to be found anywhere." It is in Hosea chapter 3 that God's unconditional, unrelenting, and unquenchable love for His people through the Lord Jesus Christ is demonstrated. In other words, it is there that God's people learn those powerful words put to music 150 years ago by Elvina Hall: "Jesus paid it all, all to Him we owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow." In Hosea 3 we learn about the purchase of life through the Lord Jesus, and thus it can be called the greatest chapter in the Bible because in it we find Christ. But there are 38 other books in the Old Testament and I trust that in my time with you all I have convinced you of a few things: (1) That the Old Testament must be believed, and for that reason it must be read, studied, taught and preached. (2) That the Old Testament must be fulfilled, and ultimately is fulfilled in Christ. (3) That the Old Testament must be interpreted rightly. And for the answer to the right way to interpret the Old Testament I will return to where we began, Dr. Luke's account of Jesus's master-Bible lesson on the road to Emmaus, described like so:

“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).