

3:16

Love That Captivates

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Love That Captivates John 3:16

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to John chapter 3. And if you don't have a Bible let me encourage you to find somebody around you who does and look on with them or borrow their Bible, share. I want you to see this text unfold today.

When I was thinking and praying through what we might study during this Christmas season in the Word, my mind immediately went to sitting around the table with a group of Muslim men in the middle of the Middle East. Many of you heard me share this when I came back from the Middle East just a couple of months ago. I was sitting around a table in the middle of Ramadan and these Muslim men, in a country where it would be a death sentence for any one of them to come to faith in Christ, for them to ask me what I believed about God. And for me to have the opportunity to begin to share who Jesus is and how Jesus has revealed the character of God and to know that the guys that were sitting at that table, as good Muslims, don't believe Jesus is God in the flesh. In fact any claim like that would be blasphemous that God would become a man like us. Like many beyond just Muslims who believe that Jesus was a good man and did good things but he isn't the Son of God. He's not God in the flesh.

And they began to look with me with inquisitive looks as I was sharing with them about who Jesus is and as I told you, I began to share with them about how when I met Heather, my wife, that I did not send somebody else to give her news that I loved her. I did not send other people to tell her the things that I thought about her. I didn't ask somebody else to ask her to marry me. I didn't send somebody else because in matters of love one must go himself.

And we have a God who has not sent this prophet or that prophet, even though I had somebody on my doorstep yesterday that tried to convince me otherwise. God did not send this messenger or that messenger. He sent Himself to show His infinite love for us. That is the beautiful yet staggering truth of Christianity and I don't think a verse sums it up better than John 3:16.

And so what I want us to do for the next few weeks leading up to our Christmas Eve service together is I want us to unpack a John 3:16 phrase by phrase by phrase. And we're going to start with just the first part of John 3:16 today.

But before we get there I want you to listen with me in on the context that leads up to John 3:16. This is not just something that Jesus kind of said all of a sudden. He was in the middle of a conversation with a very religious guy named Nicodemus and I want you to hear what happens from Verse 1 to 15 and then we're going to dive into Verse 16. Follow along with me, John 3:1,

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, 'Rabbi, we

know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.’ In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’ ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb to be born!’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, “You must be born again.” The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.’ ‘How can this be?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus...” (John 3:1-10).

And let me just pause right there. You realize Nicodemus; this is like Jesus having a conversation with a pastor. That’s why I mention when we started, this is for the most religious of us, the most committed to church so to speak.

‘You are Israel’s teacher,’ said Jesus, ‘and do you not understand these things? I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven —the Son of Man. Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life’” (John 3:10-15).

And here it is, Jesus said, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

The Setup...

Now I want us to camp out on those first few words. “For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). And in order to understand those few words I want to take it from two different angles. I want us to think real quickly about whose involved and then I want us to realize the setup story that leads up to this point.

An Infinitely Holy God

So we’ll start with the first part, who’s involved, the setup, and basically there are two people involved in that phrase, “For God so loved the world.” Number one is an infinitely holy God, an infinitely holy God. And Nicodemus knew this. Guys like Nicodemus, teachers of the Law, Pharisees; they have kind of a stereotype. When we think of them we think really negatively about who they are, but the reality is in the first century guys like Nicodemus were extremely well respected.

This is a guy who knows God is holy and he has a whole list of laws that he follows to make sure he keeps in line with the holiness of God. He follows the laws that are in the Old Testament and he and his buddies have come up with other laws to tack on to that to make sure that they are going to please a holy God. And so Nicodemus knows that the God of the universe is infinitely holy.

A Sinfully Rebellious People

But what Nicodemus doesn't fully realize is the ramifications of the second subject involved in "For God so loved the world." What you've got is an infinitely holy God and second, a sinfully rebellious world or a sinfully rebellious people.

When we hear the words "For God so loved the world," we've got to realize in the context of the book that John is writing here that that is not a commentary on the loveliness of the world. Actually whenever you see the world mentioned in John's Gospel as well as some of the other letters that he wrote later in the New Testament, he uses the world, this is a dominant theme, over and over and over again. But it's almost always in a negative light.

In John 3:19 he says the world loves darkness. Over in John 7:7 he talks about the world hating Jesus. John 15 says the world hates followers of Jesus. John chapter 14 talks about the world hates not just Jesus, but the Spirit of God. John 16 talks about how the world rejoices when the people of God are weeping and the world is the source of trouble. John 17 says the world doesn't even know God.

And then you get to 1 John and he talks about, 1 John chapter 2, how the world is the, is kind of the impetus for, the cause for all the sinful cravings of man. And you get to the end of 1 John and he basically says the whole world is under the control of the evil one. And so when you hear "For God so loved the world," this is not a commentary on the loveliness of the world. This is a commentary on the death of love in God for an unlovely world.

"For God so loved the world," now what we've got to do is you and I have to put ourselves in the shoes of Nicodemus when we hear these things being said. And we've got to realize with his Jewish background, this is a guy who is very familiar with hearing about God's love, but not for the world, he's very familiar with hearing about God's love for the people of Israel, chosen people of God. And in Jewish thought it was fairly foreign to hear the words "For God so loved the world"—everybody. God had shown His affection for the people of Israel. And that is actually the reality up through the Old Testament is that God had in a special way poured out His love and His grace and affection on the people of Israel.

And so what I want us to do is I want us to take a little bit of a journey backwards and I want us to see the relationship between God and His people in the Old Testament that is now being applied to the picture of the entire world which would include you and me. But in order to understand that, we've got to know the background that leads up to this point. Jesus does not say this in John 3 in a vacuum. There's a whole history that leads up to this point. And so I want you to take your Bibles and take a left with me and I want you to go back with me to the book of Hosea.

I want you to go back. It might be kind of tough to find Hosea. We don't go to these Minor Prophets a lot and feel free to use your table of contents if you need to. But find Hosea, the very beginning of Hosea, Hosea chapter 1 and 2 and while you're turning there I want to give you a little bit of background on Hosea.

He was a Prophet in the eighth century and basically a Prophet means that he had the responsibility to speak for God. God would speak to a prophet and say, "Here's my word," and the prophet's responsibility was to turn around and proclaim that word to His people.

In the eighth century Hosea was prophesying in the northern kingdom of Israel where sin was rampant. All throughout this book we see evidences of immorality, rampant sin. And so Hosea was the prophet that God was speaking to His people through and He would give messages to His people through this prophet called Hosea.

Now a prophet's job, while it involved primarily speaking for God was sometimes more difficult than that. Sometimes they would preach action sermons so to speak. It wouldn't be just about them coming up and saying, "If you have your Bible and I hope you do," and kind of diving into that picture. Instead what they would do is God would tell his Prophets to act out something, to do something in their lives that would be a demonstration of the things that they were saying.

Isaiah for example, you look at all the things Isaiah wrote and prophesied and it's incredible. Many people don't realize that God told Isaiah at one point that for three years he had to walk around stripped of his clothes and barefoot in order to show a demonstration of what God was going to do among His people. Nobody likes to walk around in their underwear for three years but that's what Isaiah had to do. This was a responsibility that it was upon this prophet.

And you look at Ezekiel; he had to do all kinds of things that were extremely painful in his own life that affected him deeply emotionally. You've got Jeremiah who's walking around at one point with a yolk around him. And when you come to Hosea you've got a major action sermon going on. And what God tells Hosea to do is He comes to Hosea and He says, "Hosea, I want you, in order to demonstrate what I'm going to speak through you, I want you to go and marry a woman named Gomer."

Now there are two problems with that. Number one her name is Gomer, okay? Let's just kind of get that out there you know? Dave, I want you to marry Heather. Ah, yes, yes. Dave, I want you to marry Gomer. Hmm, uh, did I hear you right? You said Gomer. I thought you said Gomer. Yes, Gomer.

So that's problem one. But on a much more serious level, the second problem, Gomer was a prostitute. Now we don't know all of Gomer's history before she married Hosea, how involved or not involved she was in prostitution, but we do know that once they were married she was very involved in prostitution and adultery. In fact you look at Hosea 1, look with me at verse 2 and 3. This is when God tells Hosea to do this. Listen to what it says, Hosea 1:2, "*When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, 'Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.' So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son*" (Hosea 1:2-3).

And so from the very beginning of this book what we've got to realize is there are two levels at which we understand this book from this point on. On one level you've got a real physical relationship between a man and his wife, Hosea and Gomer. You've got a man who is married to a woman who is running around in complete adultery on him and you've got a picture all throughout this book of the pain and the hurt that are involved in that dynamic in a marriage. And then you've got another level where this story is talking about a God and his people. And the people of God, the people of Israel are depicted all throughout Hosea through Gomer. And her children are a picture of individual Israelites.

And so when we read through Hosea what we've got to understand is there's a real story going on here in a marriage and there's also a spiritual picture here of God and His people. Now what I want you to see is how these things come together to set the stage for one of the most beautiful pictures of God's love anywhere in all of Scripture. Want you to go with me to Hosea 2 and look with me at verse 2 and I want us to read these verses. And I'll go ahead and let you know from the very beginning, these are stunning words from the mouth of God. They make us uncomfortable. They're graphic even... This is God speaking to His people. You got both these levels.

Listen in Hosea 2:2,

"Rebuke your mother, rebuke her, for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face and the unfaithfulness from between her breasts. Otherwise I will strip her naked and make her as bare as on the day she was born; I will make her like a desert, turn her into a parched land, and slay her with thirst. I will not show my love to her children, because they are the children of adultery. Their mother has been unfaithful and has conceived them in disgrace. She said, 'I will go after my lovers, who give me my food and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.' Therefore I will block her path with thorn bushes; I will wall her in so that she cannot find her way. She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them. Then she will say, 'I will go back to my husband as at first, for then I was better off than now.' She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold—which they used for Baal. "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens, and my new wine when it is ready. I will take back my wool and my linen, intended to cover her nakedness. So now I will expose her lewdness before the eyes of her lovers; no one will take her out of my hands. I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days—all her appointed feasts. I will ruin her vines and her fig trees, which she said were her pay from her lovers; I will make them a thicket, and wild animals will devour them. I will punish her for the days she burned incense to the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot," declares the Lord (Hosea 2:2-13).

The Story...

Now remember, two levels here. This is a picture of a man relating to his wife and it's a picture of the God of the universe relating to His people. And I want you to see, much like we are thinking about in terms of two characters at work in "For God so loved the world," I want you to see two groups at work in the story of Hosea.

A Story of an Unfaithful People

First of all, I want you to see that this is a story of an unfaithful people, a story of an unfaithful people. From the very beginning, verse 5, *"Their mother has been unfaithful"* (Hosea 2:5). And what you've got in verses 2 through 13 is a vivid picture of the unfaithfulness of God's people toward Him. It starts off in the very beginning, *"Rebuke your mother, rebuke her"* (Hosea 2:2). It's repeated twice for emphasis there. The word is literally "bringing accusation against" her, a legal accusation. Bring a charge against her because of her unfaithfulness and He says, *"For she is not my wife, and I am not her husband"* (Hosea 2:2).

Guys, before we even go any further in this text, I want you to know that the things we're about to think through are extremely heavy. This text is spiritually very, very heavy and this entire week studying through this text has brought just tears of realizing this picture of God and His people. And I think we need to take the time to realize the depth of unfaithfulness that is here in God's people. Not just then, but that pervades today. And Hosea doesn't say, "Well here's one thing and then number 2, number 3, number 4."

Instead there are themes that he just weaves together throughout this book and weaves together even throughout this passage. And I want us to realize the depth of unfaithfulness here and four different themes that are emphasized here.

Number one, when He's talking about Gomer, when talking about His people, number one she was adulterous. She was adulterous. He says in verse 2, "*She is not my wife, and I am not her husband. Let her remove the adulterous look from her face*" (Hosea 2:2). Now we find out later in this book that there's not been a divorce or separation or anything here, there's not been an official, "You're not my wife anymore." That has not happened.

What it is though is a picture of there's been a practical severing of that relationship, in that, with Gomer leaving Hosea and going after all these other men, and the people of God leaving God and going after all the things of this world, that practically you could never tell that she is his wife. Practically you could never tell this people belonged to this God. And it's adultery that's at the center of this picture. And we don't have to even press the imagery here too far at all to realize that God is using the pain of a wife leaving her husband and giving herself to other men as a picture of what sin does in yours or my relationship with God. That sin is spiritual adultery that it is leaving our creator, and getting our pleasures from the things of this world instead of Him, and running after them as lovers is what it mentions here.

And we need to realize at this point what a personal affront sin is to God. I think sometimes we don't realize that. Obviously if a wife leaves her husband and goes running around with all of these other men that is a personal affront to him. And that's the picture that God is giving us here of sin and what we need to realize based on Hosea 2 is that there are no spiritual singles in God's eyes. Please do not miss this.

There are no spiritual singles. Either you are faithfully married to God or you are living in spiritual adultery. Every one of us, every person within the sound of my voice, every child, every student, every man, every woman, either faithfully married to God or committing spiritual adultery with the things of this world. This undercuts the myth of spiritual neutrality that so infiltrates our culture today. So many Christians and non-Christians who believe we are nice moral people and we can maintain a neutral stance toward God. It is not possible.

God has created every single one of us for Himself. And He is worthy as our Creator of each of our worship. So not to give Him the worship that He is due is to turn from Him and give others that worship. There are no spiritual singles here. She was adulterous.

Not just adulterous, but second, she was idolatrous and this is really the core. It's the core we see throughout these verses. You see "Baal" or "Baals" mentioned at different times. Whenever you see "Baal" or "Baals," it's a reference to foreign gods. The Canaanite rain god was called "Baal," and he wasn't just the god of the rain, so they believed, he was the god who brings fruit from the earth, god who brings crops from the rain. He is the god of prosperity for your family.

And so Israel, the people of Israel, were surrounded by all kinds of pagan nations. These pagan nations that worshipped all of these different gods, including Baal. And what happened was, the Israelites made trade agreements with those nations where they would go and they would get the things that you see listed here, wine and oil and food, water, wool, all of these things. And when they would get these things they would hear these nations talking about how they have those things as a result of these gods that they worship and these idols they bow down to. And so the people of Israel started to worship

those gods as well. And they thought they would prosper if they were worshipping these gods and so you had rampant idolatry amongst the people of Israel and them attributing the things that they had to those gods.

Now that's the picture of God and His people. Imagine this on the Hosea - Gomer level. Just imagine with me. Get the picture here. God comes to Hosea and He says, "Hosea, your wife Gomer is living in a very dirty part of the city right now, a dangerous part of the city, and her needs are not being met." And Hosea says, "I know that." And God says to Hosea, "Hosea, I want you to provide for her. I want you to go to the store and you get the food and the water that she needs and you take that to her."

And you and I could only imagine the pain of saying okay, going and getting that stuff. Hosea goes to that part of the city and doesn't look up Gomer, looks up the man who Gomer is living with and goes and knocks on his door. And he opens the door and Hosea says, "Are you the one who's living with Gomer?" And he says, "Yeah, what's it to you?" Hosea says, "I'm Gomer's husband."

Immediately the man steps back. He doesn't know what's about to happen. And Gomer pulls out these goods, food and water and provisions and says, "I want to make sure that her needs are taken care of. Will you give these to her?" And that man thinks, "What a fool." And takes them and slams the door in his face as Hosea leaves. And this man then goes to Gomer with a pile of provisions and says, "Look what I have brought you." And Gomer comes to that man and says, "Thank you, thank you, wraps her arms around him and gives him Hosea's love."

We've got to catch the gravity of this picture how heavy that is. And we've got to realize that the essence of idolatry is enjoying the gifts while ignoring the giver. This is the essence of idolatry. It's what is being talked about in verse 5, verse 8, "*She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold—*" she used it to build idols to Baal, the things I gave she used to worship other gods (Hosea 2:8).

And it's not the Canaanite rain god today, and it's not this idol or that idol that we down toward, but idolatry are just as rampant. It is bowing down at the altar of success. It is enjoying the stuff that we have, the houses and the cars and the people and the things and along the way missing out on what it means to give radical devotion to the One who gives all of those things.

Now don't miss it. It wasn't that they had completely left God out of the picture; God was actually still in the picture. You get to verse 11 it says, "*I will stop all her celebrations: her yearly festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days—all her appointed feasts*" (Hosea 2:11). Do you realize what this means? That while the people of God were living in adultery with all the things of this world, they would still have their festivals and their celebrations. They would still have their Sabbaths week after week after week they would go to worship. Don't miss this. The tragedy in the book of Hosea is not just that they were engrossed in idolatry.

The tragedy is they had masked it with spiritual devotion and they had no clue how idolatrous they were. And it was the tactic of the adversary in the eighth century and I'm convinced it is the tactic of the adversary today. Spiritual involvement, religious involvement is the biggest cover up for idolatry in our culture today. Based on this text, I think this text guarantees that there are scores of people here, scores of us, who think we are worshipping God today and have no clue how really far we are from Him. She was

adulterous, idolatrous and she was hypocritical. She was running around with the things of this world yet she still had a place to give lip service to her God.

Not only adulterous, idolatrous and hypocritical, fourth indictment was that she was forgetful. Forgetful; now so you're thinking, "Well I'm that sometimes?" We're all forgetful. Why is that such a bad thing? This is on a much deeper level than a mental lapse or forgetting something that you're supposed to remember. You get to the end of those verses we read and you heard that. God says, "*I will punish her for the days she burned incense for the Baals; she decked herself with rings and jewelry, and went after her lovers, but me she forgot*" (Hosea 2:13).

This is not just forgetting something here or there that's small. This is, and we don't have time to turn there but let me read you Deuteronomy 8:11, 19-20. This is way back years before this. God had said to his people, "*Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.... If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God*" (Deut. 8:11, 19-20).

You don't forget God. It's not easy to forget the one who created you in whose image you are made. This is something that is willfully done. We choose to engross ourselves in the things of this world instead of in God. God says, "I will punish her."

Now this is where let's be honest, our view of God is really being challenged right here isn't it? Especially in our culture today where toleration is the word of the day, where everything should be tolerated. And if God is a loving God then He tolerates sin doesn't He? If God is loving, He does not punish sin. Words like destroy...? You and I think it, we hear people say it; "I cannot follow a God like that." The God that I know is loving. He doesn't punish.

Here's the deal. If you can prove to me that God does not punish sin, then I can prove to you that God does not love you. Please catch that. I'll say it one more time. If you can prove to me that God does not punish sin, then I can prove to you that God does not love you. And here's why; because sin hurts. Sin causes deep pain. Sin damns us for eternity.

Would a loving God sit back and watch that without doing anything? Is it not the fact that He loves us that drives him to punish sin? This is a truth that every single parent here knows, that I am quickly learning. There are times when it is not only necessary, it is the greatest act of love you can do in that moment to look at him and say, "Don't do that. That is not good for you." Praise God He punishes sin. It is a picture of His love. We need a radically different view of God, one that is based on Scripture.

This is heavy. "Me, she forgot" (Hosea 2:13). Deuteronomy 8, "You forget, I destroy." And that sounds severe. We got to realize even in the context of Hosea, even in this context and that culture, and it's not even just in that culture, in many parts of the Middle East today if a woman commits adultery against her husband, there are cultures today, where she would be legally killed at that moment. Now I'm not saying its right.

But that was the picture in this day and it's the picture in parts of the Middle East today. It's not that she would be taken to trial. It's her family would kill her. Death is the punishment for adultery. And even if you weren't going to go that far, at least divorce, or separation—whatever that would look like, obviously there are major consequences.

Now here's the deal. We're about to look at verse 14. Don't look at it yet. Don't look at it, everybody looking up here okay? Don't look at it. We're all going to look at it together. So now I know you really want to look at it but just wait okay? Just wait. Hang with me for a second, nobody looking down.

I want you to know that the first word in Hosea 2:14 is going to be "therefore." Now whenever we see "therefore" in the Bible we know that what's about to come after the "therefore" is completely based on what has just come before. Right? "Therefore in light of this, this is what's going to happen."

And so here's the picture. Verse 14 is about to tell us therefore. Verses 2 through 13 have just given us, don't look yet, verses 2 through 13 have just given us a stinging indictment of adultery, idolatry, hypocrisy and completely turning your back on your God. "Therefore" God says, "in light of the fact that you have run after the things of this world and you don't even think about me anymore, I am completely out of your mind. In light of the fact that you are bowing down and worshiping all of these other gods, in light of the fact that you still pretend like you're following me in the middle of that. In light of the fact that you have completely blocked me out and all the love and affection I have shown to you, in light of that, therefore," look at it with me. *"Therefore," God says, "I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her"* (Hosea 2:14).

Wow! That makes no sense, no sense whatsoever! Gomer, the Israelites, have done nothing. They've not repented one bit. They've not turned back. They're still living over here with their lovers. God is still over there. God says, "In light of that I am going to allure her." What is that about?

This is the God of the universe who has the basis for infinite judgment on His people using that as the basis for showing infinite grace to His people. This is the God of the universe defying all logic and defying all reason and saying in light of her sin, I am going to flat out pursue her with my love." And I am convinced there are few verses more beautiful than Hosea 2:14.

A Story of an Unreasonable God

This is a story of an unfaithful people, and a story of an unreasonable God, a very unreasonable God. This defies logic. It defies reason that God would say these things.

And what happens... You got to catch this. The initiative is all His. There is not one verse in here that talks about what she does to come back to God. It is all Him going to her. He says over and over and over again, "I will do this. I will, I will, I will, I will." This is the picture of our God who takes the initiative and He runs to us.

I just want you to hear these words. This is God speaking to unfaithful people and He says, first, we just talked about it, "I will allure her." "I will allure her" literally means "to woo her." "I will attract her." One definition of this word in the original language of the Old Testament is "to persuade her by means of attractive benefits." Not force her, "I'm not going to force her to love me, I will allure her. I'll allure her to myself by the great love I show."

This is what I did when I wanted a date with Heather. That's when you allure. This is me going up and being around her and trying to say cool things that will impress her. This is me writing notes here or there that will give her hints here or there that I would like to go out with her. I remember at one point we were at a church retreat event. We were sitting there eating pizza and I don't know how it happened but she dared me to try to eat a whole pizza,

whole Papa John's large pizza and I don't know why that happened but I was like whatever she says to do I'm going to do it. So it's like all right. And I ate this pizza. Like that whole pizza was going to show my love to her but that's what I did. I'm alluring her.

I'm putting a shirt on to go out and thinking "What will she think of this shirt? How will she think of how I'm dressed?" Like she even cared at that moment but I thought she did and so I'm thinking through everything I say, everything I do. How can I draw her to myself? This is what the God of the universe does with you; with you, not just the person beside you, in front of you, behind you, right where you're sitting, you.

And this reverses everything; every religious system in the world says we do those things for God. We get dressed up for God. We do this for God. We follow these rules for God. We do all this stuff and we'll lure God to have favor on us. And Christianity radically turns things on their head and it's now God pursuing you. What an incredible truth that God would use this word, a word that we would use today to talk about a teenage guy trying to get a date, He would use that word to talk about how He wants to attract us to Himself.

"I'll allure her. I will lead her into the desert." I love that. I'll lead her in the desert earlier in this chapter was a picture of danger. You don't want to be in the desert but now God says, "I will lead her in the desert so that it will just be me and her and so that she can be completely encapsulated by my advances toward her." I mean this is something you expect to see in Song of Solomon. This is a very romantic passage.

"I will lead her into the desert and speak tenderly to her. I will speak tenderly to her." This is a Hebrew idiom. Literally means speak to her heart. It's a phrase that a guy when he was asking a girl to marry him in that day would use. That's the word that God uses to say I will speak to her heart.

I will give to her, "*There I will give her back her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor the door of hope*" (Hosea 2:14). This is an incredible picture. The Valley of Achor literally means "valley of trouble" back in Joshua 7, earlier in the Old Testament. This was a place where major sin had been committed against God that had jeopardized them going into the Promised Land and it was called "the Valley of Trouble" is what they called it from that point on. And God says, I'm going to take the depth of Israel's sin and I'm going to turn it into a door of hope.

Now that sounds like Old Testament history until you realize the ramifications for our lives in this room. There is no one here whose magnitude of sin God cannot turn into a door of hope. There's not one person no matter how deep, no matter how thick, no matter how long the sin is in your life, there is not one person here who He will not take the magnitude of that sin and turn it into a door of hope.

I will give her, I will restore her. Verse 16, "*In that day,' declares the Lord, 'you will call me 'my husband''; you will no longer call me 'my master''*" (Hosea 2:16). Beginning of this chapter, "She is not my wife, I'm not her husband." "I will bring her to the place and that day you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.'" I love this. It's not us coming back to God and saying, "okay, yes sir. I'm sorry I messed up. What do I do now?" It's us coming back gazing into His eyes as a wife gazes into the eyes of her husband and saying 'you're my husband'. It's coming back to Him as husband, not master.

"I will restore and I will protect her." I love this. It says in verse 18, "*In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground*" (Hosea 2:18). Beasts, birds, creatures? "Listen, come here.

We need to talk. You are not going after my people. My people are protected." *"Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety"* (Hosea 2:18). I will protect her.

Next, "I will betroth her." Now I know that's not a word we use a lot and I tried to think of a more contemporary word but the beauty of it is this is a word and we got to get it in its original language. This is more than just an engagement so to speak. This is a word that would be used to describe how a man would betroth the woman he wanted to be married to and it was like an engagement but at that point when they were betrothed they would legally be looked at as married. He would pay a price for that to happen and God says, *"I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion"* (Hosea 2:19). For an unfaithful people, *"I will betroth you in faithfulness"* (Hosea 2:20). It's a beautiful picture.

And it's kind of like... The picture is don't miss this. It's not her coming back to him and then them having to dive into all the stuff she done and how much she'd messed up and all of that. The language here is it's starting over with a clean slate like that is behind and not even a factor anymore. I give you a picture of the forgiveness of God as far as the east is from the west. It is not coming back to God and saying, "Okay, let's rehash all the things I've done." It's saying, "God, I know I've done wrong" and he says, "I will betroth her. Let's start over. Clean slate.

I will betroth her. I will respond to her. He repeats this word over and over gain. *"In that day I will respond," declares the Lord—"I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and oil, and they will respond to Jezreel"* (Hosea 2:21-22). Basically God says, "I'm going to talk to the skies and they're going to bring you rain. Not Canaanite rain god, Baal, I'm going to bring the rain and then I'm going to tell the earth to yield its fruit so you're going to prosper because of the way I respond." He literally says, "I'm going to move heaven and earth to provide for you."

"I will respond to her. I will establish her." He uses that word Jezreel at the end of verse 22 which is another name for Israel but it's a word that means to plant and He says, *"I will plant her for myself in the land"* (Hosea 2:23). "I'm going to establish her there." Now here's the deal. God has said these nine things. Incredible words from God but the picture is Hosea's still over here and Gomer's still living over there. God's still over here and His people are still engrossed in these things over here. So what happens?

You get to chapter 3 which is one of the most incredible chapters in all of Scripture and it says this, *"The Lord said to me,"* me being Hosea, *"Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes"* (Hosea 3:1), which is something that was used in idol feasts. *"So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and about a homer and a lethek of barley. 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 live with you"* (Hosea 3:2-3).

Now we don't know all the details here. We don't know if Gomer was; it was very possible she could have been a temple prostitute in these pagan religions. They would have temples established to these different gods and prostitution would rain out of them. We don't know if that was the situation she was in or if she was living as a slave to another man. We do know that in order to bring Gomer back to himself it was going to cost Hosea. We know earlier from the book of Exodus that the price of a female slave in that kind of setting is about 30 shekels. Hosea didn't even have that much.

God comes to Hosea and He says, "Hosea, no matter what it costs I want you to go and buy her back." So he does. He goes to the man or the men who own his wife and he says, "I don't have enough money but I'll give my money and this other stuff that I have to get my wife back." And that is the picture that God uses to talk about the way He loves His people.

Yes He will allure her. He will lead her, speak to her, give to her, restore her, betroth her, respond to her but in the end God says, "I will pay the price for her. I'll pay the price."

And I give you the picture of God in the Old Testament that leads up to the God of John 3:16. Now I know when we look at those things and we hear those words that there are many including those Muslim friends of mine who would say that this is a weak picture of God. That he would use these words to describe His love and who He is. I think... An old pastor in Philadelphia, Donald Gray Barnhouse, he said this. He sums it up best.

When we see this love at work through the heart of Hosea, we may wonder if God is really like that but everything in the word and in experience shows us that He is. He will give man the trees of the forest and the iron in the ground. Then He will give to man the brains to make an axe from the iron to cut down a tree and fashion it into a cross. He will give man the ability to make a hammer and nails and when man has the cross and the hammer and the nails, the Lord will allow man to take hold of Him and bring Him to that cross. And in so doing will take the sins of man upon Himself and make it possible for those who have despised and rejected Him to come unto Him and know the joy of sins removed and forgiven to know the assurance of pardon and eternal life and to enter into the prospect of the hope of glory with Him forever.

This is our God and there is none like Him.

Gomer's only hope was in a love she never deserved. Your only hope is in a love you do not deserve. Yet "*God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*" (John 3:16).

Will you bow your heads with me? With our heads bowed, eyes closed, this is where we started. This is where I want us to end. I want to ask every single person here this question. Every child, every student, every man, every woman here, "Are you faithfully married to God?"

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