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Sermon Series: *Jesus' Wife, No. 4*

Reconciled

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Hosea 2:14-23 (NIV)

"Therefore I am now going to allure her; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵ There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

¹⁶ "In that day," declares the Lord, "you will call me 'my husband'; you will no longer call me 'my master.' ¹⁷ I will remove the names of the Baals from her lips; no longer will their names be invoked.

¹⁸ In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, the birds in the sky and the creatures that move along the ground. Bow and sword and battle I will abolish from the land, so that all may lie down in safety. ¹⁹ I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. ²⁰ I will betroth you in faithfulness, and you will acknowledge the Lord.

²¹ "In that day I will respond," declares the Lord – "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth; ²² and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. ²³ I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"

We've been talking for a few weeks here about the Church, the body of Christ, as Jesus' bride – Jesus' *wife*, and what a privilege and undeserved blessing it is to be that.

I think we can easily forget just how much God, the groom – our groom – loves us!

And, we can also forget how His great love for us is designed to purify and transform the character of His bride. Receiving and living in His love winds up making us more beautiful.

To communicate that – the depth and power of His love for us and for His creation – is, I think, one reason why God chose this bride and groom metaphor for our relationship with Him.

We've looked at several New Testament passages where it appears: Revelation 19 and 21, Ephesians 5, Second Corinthians 11. Last week we found it in parable form in Matthew 25.

What we see today, though, is that this whole idea of God as groom and His people as bride is nothing new – it wasn't just some invention of Jesus'.¹

The idea and image of God as husband to His people appears first, I think, in Exodus 19, at the foot of Mount Sinai. God presented there all He'd done for the nation of Israel over those years.

There in verse 4, God said to Moses, "*Tell the people of Israel, 'You have seen what I did to Egypt... how I carried you on eagle's wings and*

¹ God's relationship with Israel as a groom and bride appears all through the OT – Isa 54:4-8, 62:5; Jeremiah 31:32; Ezekiel 16:7; Hosea 2:16-19

brought you to myself. So now, if you will keep my covenant... you will be my treasured possession out of all nations."

And it's right there that Israel first said to God, "*I do.*" Or maybe, "*We do. We will.*"

And that's where the wedding ceremony begins, you see? You can read about it in the second half of Exodus 19, how the people consecrate themselves, and then, how the Lord came upon the mountain, and the whole place shook and the mountain itself smoked and the music grew louder and louder.

It was a wedding – and what a wedding it was!

Now, I've been to some memorable weddings – I've conducted a few.

I've seen weddings where one of the bridal party passed out and where the groom tripped and nearly fell down. At one wedding, I dropped the rings as I prayed over them; at one, the bride had second thoughts just before walking down the aisle. There was one where a bridesmaid had a "wardrobe malfunction," one where everyone just about melted due to heat – and on and on.

But all those sorts of things are *completely forgettable* compared to *this*, described in Exodus 19. This was a wedding that, you would think, the people involved would never, ever forget.

And yet they did, didn't they?

The fact is, before Moses even came down from the mountain, they forgot, and they went to Aaron, the priest, and said to Him, essentially, "Hey, we know we just made a commitment to this God of yours. We know we just got married, but will you help us commit adultery? Will you help us cheat? We know we just said, "I do" to this God who shook the mountain, but [look at watch] He hasn't done much for us lately, so we're moving on to someone else."

That's what led to the golden calf and the creation of an idol,

which then led to God's burning anger against them, which led to Moses' plea for their lives,

which led to God's relenting, which then led to Moses' burning anger against

Israel, which led to Aaron's lying about how the golden calf that they were worshipping came to be,

(remember, Moses asked, "What is this?" and Aaron lied, as people often do when caught cheating, "It just leaped out of the fire!")

which then led to punishment, and on and on!

You see, the nation of Israel – the bride – forgot about her marriage, and by that, I mean the Israelites just dismissed it – chose to ignore it.

And they did so over and over again through the following centuries, which explains, you see, all the language in the Old Testament about Israel “playing the harlot.”

Though Israel, at Sinai, was married to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and although she had committed herself to Him, she (spiritually) prostituted herself over and over and over again. She followed foreign Gods; she *ran, willingly*, after them, trusting in *them* to care for her, all the while *ignoring* her “husband” at home.

About 40 passages in the Old Testament talk about Israel “playing the harlot,” cheating on her husband again and again.

Here’s how bad it was: the word “baal” is not an intrinsically bad word.

In its noun form it’s translated “husband.” In its verb form it means “married.” So, you see, early on God Himself is called Baal – the “baal,” the “husband” of Israel.

God Himself is also ba’al, “married,” to Israel.

But Israel cheated on God so much, the word “baal” essentially lost its neutral meaning and came to be used as a synonym for idols – for all the gods with whom Israel had affairs.

That’s why the word, “baal” morphed into an intrinsically *negative* word and why Israel began using a different word altogether for “husband.”

Israel was committed – married. Yet over and over, she despised that, she ignored that, she dismissed that, and she forgot her wedding, her promise, her husband.

But God did not.

God did not forget.

He did not forget Israel. He did not forget that He was married. He did not forget His wife.

And this is what brings us to the prophet Hosea.

What we see here in Hosea, above all else, is the fact that, in spite of all that Israel did and did not do, God’s full intention remains reconciliation with His wayward wife.

God still wants Israel back.

This *depth* of love –

This *firmness* of commitment –

This *willingness* to forgive –

This *extent* of patience –

This is who our God, Yahweh, is – and has always been!

Beyond all else that is here in this passage, and there is much, what we need to grasp first is the depth of God’s desire for *reconciliation* and all that He’s willing to do to make it happen.

From that day to today – from wayward Israel to every wayward individual around us – short of committing sin Himself, it seems that there is nothing God will not do to bring about reconciliation.

That’s how much He loves Israel. That’s how much He loves you and me and us.

That’s why even giving His son, Jesus, to die on a cross was not too much for Him.

Please, don’t *ever* think that you are *unloved*. God loves, loves, loves you.

Don’t *ever* think you are *worthless*. You are worth life itself to God.

Don’t ever think you are unwanted, because *God* wants you *desperately*, and not to *use* or *abuse* or *toy* with or *deprive* either, but to *cherish* – and to *restore*, to make *lovely* and *beautiful and whole*.

God will do all He can to repair this marriage – to reconcile us to Himself. He will go to extreme measures, in fact, as we see here in Hosea.

In verse 15 there, God says about sinful, wayward Israel, “*I am now going to allure her.*”

That word, translated “allure,” is usually used in a bad sense, translated “entice” or “seduce.”

Here, though, it’s used in a positive way. It literally means, “speak to the heart,” which is exactly what God is wanting to do: He is “enticing” His wayward people back to Himself – trying to convince them to love Him again.

Now, just think of that! What a remarkable stooping of the Almighty God, to win, again, the hearts of His people.

And how is He doing it?

By taking them to the wilderness – to a dry, barren, lonely place.

Now, we might say, “Well that’s not very romantic. If I were God, I’d take her to a nicer place.”

Ah, but that’s why God is God and we are not, you see?

God takes His wayward bride to the wilderness for a very good reason.

Where, in her past, did Israel grow closest to God? Where did she come to really trust Him?

Where was she able to see clearly His love for her? Where was she convinced that He would protect her and provide for her?

That did not happen in places of plenty, did it?

It happened, most profoundly, in times of trouble, and specifically, in the 40 years in the wilderness: back when there was only God and Israel; back in their “dating days,” you might say; back when life was simple, and where Israel had only Him on whom to rely.

All that while, God faithfully provided for them and protected them, didn’t He? Day after day.

And they grew to trust Him – and love Him and appreciate Him.

That’s why God says He’ll take them to the wilderness. He wants to put them, again, in a place where life is stark and simple, so He could show them His love, so they could see Him – so there might be room in their lives for Him again.

You see, the deepest, most intimate times between God and His bride didn’t occur during Israel’s years of power and prosperity – during the days of Solomon,

for example, when they had plenty, when they were the envy of the nations around them and living in luxury and peace.

No, the deepest, most intimate times between God and His bride came in the wilderness, where there was scarcity and insecurity and poverty.

Back where enemies threatened them.

Back when they had nothing to call their own.

Back when it was "God and Israel against the world," to quote the old Helen Reddy song.

Back there, God's love and presence were easily seen.

You know, that may well be why God hardly ever leads His people anywhere, really, by the most direct route: because trust is built in the journey, and the harder the journey, the more God provides – and the more God provides, the more trust is established.

It was the hardest parts of Israel's journey that really shaped the relationship.

And really, that's still true today. It's the times of trouble that really forge commitment and trust in a couple.

The busyness and complexities of life – even brought by blessing and prosperity – bring distractions to relationships that often drive people apart.

But when all you have is each other – that's where relationships are made.

And that's what God is hoping will happen in Israel's heart. He will move His people back to a wilderness place so they might see, again, how He can provide for them.

He'll prove Himself again to them, that they might, again, trust *Him* – and Him alone.

That they might see that no idol – no baal – is going to feed them and clothe them and speak kindly and lovingly to them.

Israel rejected Yahweh because she thought the baals would supply her needs. She thought the grass was greener on the other side, you know?

Just like people sometimes believe today.

But God's hope here is that, in the desert, she will remember that the baals of the world have no real power.

No baal can ever love like Yahweh.

No baal can do what God can do.

God hopes to convince her of this. Verse 15 there, He says, "*There I will give her back her vineyards, and will make even the Valley, the Valley of Achor, a door of hope.*"

Valleys are not identified as places of hope.

Mountaintops are where the hope is.

Valleys are places of despair.

That was true for Israel in the very Valley of Achor.

That's where she discovered that the fellow Achan, one in their army, kept some of the plunder from Jericho for himself. And he was stoned there.

Achor was a very low point in an otherwise glorious victory.² A valley in every sense.

But God says that He will turn even that valley into a place of hope.

Out of even the valleys, out of the desert places, God says in verse 15 there, "*Israel, my bride, will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt. She will again call me her husband.*"³

And the covenant will be renewed.

And all that was wrong in the world will be made right.

And there was plenty that was wrong, because that's what sin – separation from God – does, you see? It corrupts, such that everything suffers.

Even the animals, the plants, the relationships between peoples and nations.

Where God is pushed out – where the Husband is rejected, everything becomes broken and tense and difficult.

That's what happened to Israel as she rejected and left and cheated on her Husband.

But if she would return to Him, if she would be reconciled, He would fix it all.

That's what He wanted for Israel.

And He still wants that today. Through Jesus, God's desire and offer of marriage and reconciliation still stands.

And how our world needs to receive it.

Look at what's happening in our world today!

Violence in the cities, large and small.

Distrust between people and governments.

Hatred between races.

A deepening, dangerous anger.

The dismissing and disposing of human life.

This mad desire more and more people have to escape reality through any means possible.

The highest good in our day has become blatant self-indulgence, and it's leading to utter chaos and despair.

And it's all because we've forgotten our God – and who He created us to be. His bride!

He wants so badly to restore that bride / groom relationship in our day – so all can be made whole and right again.

But, to do that – to allure us, He may well need to take us to the desert – to the wilderness.

So that we can see our need for Him –

So we can see that His way is the only way that works.

He may well have to take us to the wilderness to show us that none of the baals of our day – money, status, possessions, sexual freedom, self-indulgence – can ever bring the reconciliation and peace that we need.

None of that can take ever take the place of God.

None will ever provide for our good – as Yahweh can.

² Joshua 7:25-26

³ Hosea 2:15-16

Personally, I believe He is only beginning to take our nation through the wilderness – He is only beginning to bring us to the bottom of ourselves.

But never forget that His goal in it all is to be reconciled.

And listen, He does that with persons too.

If you're in the wilderness today, realize that you may be there simply because of the general effects of sin in our world. That just happens to good people in our broken world.

We're tempted to get mad, maybe even mad at God and condemn the experience.

But the better thing to do is to look humbly to Him and say, "God, I realize I may be here just because of the overwhelming sin that exists in our world, and if that's the case, then would you provide for me and protect me – as long as I'm here?"

On the other hand, just as God led Israel to the wilderness, so may He lead us there.

If that's the case, the prayer to pray is, "Lord, if you've put me here in this dry place, as you put Israel there, will you help me to learn whatever I have to learn? Will you show me the baals – the powerless

idols in my life, and will you help me to become, again, your faithful, trusting, beautiful bride?"

You see, the day is coming when all nature, all the heavens and earth, will be reconciled to Him.

But you know, more important to Him than all of that, God wants reconciliation with you and me and every single person on earth.

He wants His bride.

He wants this marriage back.

He's taken every initiative He can to make it happen.

But He leaves the decision to us.

Will you put away any other 'baal' in your life, and say "yes" to your groom – without reservation?

That's what He wants to know today.

Prayer

Song: *More Love to Thee*

Benediction