

God's Inextinguishable Love

Hosea 2:14-3:5

3 November 2019 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: Can God still love us, even when we've failed him?

Big Idea: God's love isn't extinguished by our failure.

Introduction

There's something mesmerising about fire.

Who doesn't like to stare into flames on cold winter's night, watching the flames as they dance on the wood?

Slowly, as the fuel's burned up, the flames get smaller and smaller until you're left with glowing coals.

As you toddle off to bed, you know that without more wood, the fire is going to go out.

You might even pour some water on top to make sure that it's extinguished.

If you get up and have a look at the fire the next morning, what does it look like?

Often just the odd stick here and there covered in white ash.

If you put your hands near to it, you probably won't feel any heat.

People have made the mistake of walking over the top of a fire like that, thinking that it's safe.

But if you push back the top layer, there are often still coals glowing inside.

Even though a fire might look like it's been extinguished – perhaps by pouring a lot of water on top – it's not uncommon for there to be enough heat to burn your feet.

More than a few bushfires have been started by fires that weren't actually out.

And by adding a little bit more fuel, you can get often get the fire going again.

There's limits to every analogy, but that's a bit like what God's love is like.

We mightn't think we can extinguish God's love with a bucket of water, but we think he'll be permanently put off by our unfaithfulness.

If we do enough things to him, then he'll write us off forever.

We can believe that our sin is the end of the road, destroying any possibility of him ever loving us again.

The book of Hosea reminds us that God's love is faithful – it continues to glow with heat even when we can't see it.

Our disobedience doesn't put out the spark of God's love.

Outline

In chapter two of Hosea, God speaks to his people, rebuking them and calling them back from their unfaithfulness.

Israel is described as God's bride who's gone and committed adultery with another god.

They'd taken all the good things Yahweh had given them and praised the god Baal for providing them.

Even worse, they had the hide to use God's good gifts to worship and honour this other, false god.

God Almighty won't let his people to settle for anything less than himself.

He wants us to worship him because there is no one better – no god, no person who will love us like God does.

He warns his wife that if they don't leave these illicit lovers, then he'll need to stage an intervention.

The provision and protection they've enjoyed will be withheld so that they can see that Baal is nothing more than a powerless sham, a phony.

Then they could see that all the blessings they'd enjoyed came from the God of the Bible.

It wasn't that long after that the words of this prophecy came true.

According to the history books, the Assyrian army came and invaded Israel.

After some rocky years, they were finally relocated somewhere else in 722BC.

God's judgment fell on his people.

God's judgment is an opportunity for his mercy and grace.

Sometimes, we need to be humbled so that we come to the end of ourselves and see the failure of the things we're tempted to put our trust in.

Then we can see God's underserved grace for the truly amazing gift that it is.

Not only does God delight to show mercy – holding back so that we don't receive the consequences we deserve – but he also shows us grace – giving us kindness that we don't deserve.

As God's prophecy for his lover continues to unfold in chapter two, we see that God's love isn't based on our performance.

Chapter three reveals that God's love depends on his faithfulness, not ours.

The message of these verses is that **God's love isn't extinguished by our failure.**

There's two clear movements that we're going to look at:

- A new day with a new way (2:14-23)
- A new day for those who stray (3:1-5)

A new day with a new way (2:14-23)

I like these long mornings we get as spring turns into summer.

There was an absolute cracker of a sunrise that I got to see during this last week.

There's something really nice about waking up naturally to a new morning.

The quiet and peace of dawn feels fresh, a new start.

That's not how God's people are feeling.

He's speaking to them because they're in a pickle.

Israel had been unfaithful to the covenant they had with Yahweh.

He promised that he'd be their God and they promised that they'd be his people.

Only they weren't faithful to him at all.

They'd gone off and cuddled up to other gods.

There are three 'therefores' in chapter two.

Verse 6 – "Therefore I will block her path with thornbushes."

Verse 9 – "Therefore I will take away my grain when it ripens."

When you read the third one – in verse fourteen – you kind of wonder what bad news God is going to deliver this time.

God's even going to take his people back into the wilderness.

In most stories, going out into the wilderness means that something's going to go horribly wrong.

The woodcutter took Snow White into the wilderness and it wasn't meant to be for her good.

Instead of more words of judgement, though, God's going to take his people in the wilderness and he'll speak kindly to her.

God's looking forward to a new dawn, a new beginning, a fresh start.

He literally wants to speak tenderly to their hearts.

He's going to take her back and win her love.

Hosea 2:14 (NIV11) ¹⁴ "Therefore I am now going to allure her;

That's why he's taking them back to where it all began.

The wilderness is where they first met.

It's the place where they had those first awkward conversations.

Going back to the wilderness is a bit like a second honeymoon.

I don't actually know where my wife and I first met.

But there's one place along the Brisbane River that's very special to us – a particular seat under particular tree.

Whenever we go back to that spot, we're reminded of the early days of our love story.

It was the same with Israel.

It was in the wilderness that God revealed himself and his name – I AM.

That's where, after they'd escaped from Egypt, God gave them his law.

That's where the love story between God and Israel as a nation first began.

The covenant between God and his people was cut there.

God's judgment will take them into the wilderness, but it's actually also setting the stage for his grace.

This's a promise that their relationship is going to be reset.

God's taking them back to promise them a new day, a fresh start, another beginning.

A new day with a new way of living.

This's going to be a like second exodus.

God is going to release his people from slavery again, but this time it won't be from slavery in Egypt.

He's going to release them from slavery to sin.

There will be a new covenant, to copy the language of Jeremiah.

God's promise was that history will repeat itself, but this time the story is going to be profoundly different.

He's going to give them good vineyards, just like he gave them a good land to go into the first time.

God's people have been here before, but they messed it up.

Instead of living happily ever after, they started an affair at the wedding reception.

And then they kept on having affairs throughout their relationship.

The Valley of Achor was a bad memory – the name means “Valley of trouble”.¹

When God brought the people into the land, they crossed the Jordan River and came to the city of Jericho.

It was impregnable with the high and strong walls around it.

But just by marching around it and shouting, God made the walls come crumbling down.

God told them not to keep any of the spoils of their victory because it wasn't really their victory at all.

All the profits go to the person who won – which was God, not the Israelites.

After all, he was the one who'd actually won the battle.

But there was a lad named Achan.

He decided that he was going to keep some of the plunder – a cloak, gold and silver.

God had just given them a great victory and they should've been able to move on easily.

But when they came to the much weaker city of Ai, they were defeated.

This was because of Achan's sin.

God judged him for it in the Valley of Achor.

The Valley of Achor should've been a door of hope – a place where they looked forward, remembering God's great victory in the past.

This time, things will be different.

God's promise was that this second time, he's going to turn that place into what it should've been the first time – a place of hope.

God will lead them into his land, the place where he will love them.

God gives three snapshots into what that'll look like.

Each one begins with the words “In that day...” – verses sixteen, eighteen and twenty-one.

In that day, they’ll be done with their idolatry and it’ll change their relationship with God.

Israel will call Yahweh her husband, rather than her master.

The relationship between a slave and a master is obviously completely different to the relationship between a husband and wife.

There’s another play on words here too.

If you’re go the NIV, you’ll notice that there’s a footnote in verse 16 – “... you will no longer call me, ‘My Baal’.”

They saw the Lord and Baal as being the same.

But in that day, they won’t be serving the Baal and calling him “my master” as if he was the one, true God.

Instead, the name of Baal will be forgotten, not even remembered.

In that day, they’ll set up home together and it’ll be a place of peace.

When God released Noah, his family and all the animals from the ark, he made a covenant with them.²

That promise was that he wouldn’t obliterate any life.

There won’t be any war or killing under God’s peace.

Compare that with 2:12 where the wild animals would devour them.

And there will be peace between people because there will be righteousness and justice, verse 19.

People will love each other and show compassion towards each other.

God had betrothed himself to his people.

Betrothal in the ancient world meant more than engagement does today, but less than marriage.

It was a formal commitment (a dowry changed hands) and the couple were called husband and wife, but they didn’t live together.

God committed himself to be faithful, promising that they would know him.

The NIV is a bit soft when it says that they’ll just “acknowledge him”.

It should be “know” as this means that they’ll know him biblically.

This's using the language of sexual intimacy but it's more than just a euphemism, although it is that.

It's focus isn't on the physical act of intimacy, but on the depth of knowing that comes with it.

The third snapshot is of a prosperous place.

God will send rain on the earth which will cause things to grow again, producing good things.

This is a bit like a picture of a return to Eden before the fall.

There will be restoration after defeat – a new day with a new way.

The picture at the end of this chapter is very different to the one at the start.

There's hope for a new day, a new future.

Look down to verse twenty-three:

Hosea 2:23 (NIV11) 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.' "

It shows us that God's love isn't extinguished by our failure.

In fact, God's love rises like a phoenix from the ashes of his judgment.

It's there in that word Jezreel, verse 22.

Remember that it was associated with bloodshed, but it also means 'God plants'.

Both are true!

God saves his people through judgment.

Our Lord Jesus was judged by human beings and although he was found to be innocent, he was put to death.

God's judgment landed on him instead of us.

He didn't experience the judgement he deserved, but the judgment we deserved.

That's hands-down the greatest act of love.

That our God would take the punishment we deserve because of our sin on himself, so that we can be forgiven.

That's the event that makes this total transformation possible.

But what do we do with the words of this prophecy?

The world certainly still doesn't look like now like the way that he describes "that day" in this passage.

Jesus' work on the cross means that has been won for us – Jesus has forged a new covenant in his blood.

But as we wait, we need the words of Peter:

2 Peter 3:13 (NIV11) ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

God's promise here gives us the hope of a new day with a new way.

A new day for those who stray (3:1-5)

Who gets to share in that picture?

How will that even be possible?

Who should be looking forward?

God's speech ends at the end of chapter two and at the beginning of chapter three, we return to the story of Hosea and Gomer.

This time, though, we hear the story from Hosea's perspective – this is his testimony!

God spoke to Hosea at the beginning of chapter one and gave him a really difficult assignment.

Now he speaks again to the prophet and this time his direction is even harder.

God wanted him to go and show love to his wife again.

Hosea 3:1a (NIV11) ¹ The LORD said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress.

Some people think that this's just a retelling of chapter one or that it's another woman, but I'm fairly sure God's talking about Gomer here.

As I understand it, when they first got married, she was a bit of a ladies man.

Even still, Hosea married her knowing that she was going to be unfaithful.

In fact, that's exactly WHY God told him to marry her.

Can you imagine how heartbroken Hosea must've been when she was unfaithful though?

To have his wife turn around and reject him must've hurt badly.

He would've been no less heartbroken to lose the love of his life, even though he knew it'd happen.

He must've been tempted to be angry, to lash out in revenge.

It'd be understandable if he wanted nothing to do with her.

And now God's telling him to go and win her back.

Even though she's an adulteress, she's "loved by another man."

The other man or men don't really love her at all, of course – that's another biblical euphemism.

You might think that Gomer should be written-off because of her sin.

She'd been unfaithful by breaking their marriage vows.

This is God's prophet. Why would he have anything to do with her?

Surely she'd made her decision and so now she can live out the consequences.

And yet God tells Hosea to marry her anyway.

Even despite her failures and unfaithfulness.

Presumably this doesn't violate God's own law as it's laid down in Deuteronomy 24.

We're given the reason in the second half of verse one.

Just like in verse one, Gomer was a model for what the people of Israel are like, here Hosea is a model of what God is like.

God has experienced the heartbreak of being betrayed.

Like a husband is betrayed by an affair, Israel had left him for other gods.

They'd chased after vigorous religious experience and yet God loves them anyway.

What's the deal with the raisin cakes?

They were a cake made of compressed, dried grapes.

David ate them as he danced before the Lord in 2 Samuel 6:19.

Raisins were the super food of the ancient world.

They were the energy drinks of the ancient world – like "V" and "Red Bull".

They were an energy boost – the pick me up – the cup of coffee – that gave you energy for the wild religious celebrations.

The reason that Hosea is to love his unfaithful wife is because God loves his unfaithful people.

Love her in the same way that the Lord loves his people who chase after other gods.

Isn't that an outstanding picture of God's grace!

He doesn't give up on his people.

God's love isn't extinguished by our failures.

There are lots of names that are used for Satan, the Devil in the Bible.

He's sometimes called a liar because he uses outright lies against us – telling us things that simply aren't true.

Another name for him is "The Accuser" because one of the most effective weapons that he has is actually using the truth against us.

One of the most effective techniques he can use is to accuse you of the things that you've done.

Ben, you're a liar. You're a thief. You're a pervert.

And all of those are true – I stand here before you, deeply ashamed that I can be rightly accused of all of those.

In this story, I'm not Hosea, I am Gomer.

I've been unfaithful to God and am full of disloyal habits.

If that's all that there was to be said, I'd be condemned.

But this truth is only half the truth.

God's love isn't extinguished by our failures.

God doesn't need to save good people.

He sent his son to die for failures.

Jesus came to forgive people like you and me.

I stand not because of how good I am, but because God loves me.

He's given me a second chance.

Friend, you might well be here this morning knowing that you can't even love yourself.

You might be quite certain that God can't love you.

Let me tell you that just isn't true.

"But you don't know what I've done!" you might say.

True, I don't. But let me tell you that the more pastoral ministry I do, the less and less that surprises me.

But even if what you've done did surprise me, it wouldn't surprise the Lord.

I know with 100% certainty that God can take your shame away and that he'll show his love to everyone who comes to him in repentance and faith.

There's nothing that's too horrible, too terrible, too unfaithful to forgive if you seek him.

The God of the Bible is faithfully committed to his people.

Your unfaithfulness might mean that you don't deserve his love, but it also doesn't mean that he'll stop giving it.

God's love isn't extinguished by our unfaithfulness.

God's love overcomes the horror of our sin.

God CAN forgive you.

This has some more application for us.

Do you see that God's love was the model for how Hosea should live?

That direction is really important – God did this, he's the pattern.

That also means that Hosea's action isn't unusual... it's grounded in God's character.

Did you notice that adultery didn't end their marriage?

I've only had a glimpse of the pain and anger of other people who go through finding that a wife has committed adultery or that a husband has been addicted to pornography.

I can only imagine the agony it must be to feel betrayed like that.

But here we see that our failures don't extinguish God's love and other people's failures don't need to extinguish our love either.

Friends, I hope you don't ever end up in the place where you have to experience that kind of hurt.

But if you do, the marriage doesn't have to be over.

What a victory it is when a husband and wife slowly rebuild their marriage.

Day-by-day, letting trust grow that kind of betrayal to the point that hopefully the marriage is stronger.

That's hard, but it's possible.

It's possible but it takes the kind of love that God shows to his people.

And it's not just our spouse, it's our friends as well.

When our friends betray us, it's easy to write them off.

The temptation is not to love them and instead to have nothing to do with them.

If God's relationship with his people is the model for a spouse, how much more for others.

The account isn't over though. There's more to be said.

Hosea goes and buys his wife back.

We can only guess at why he needed to do that because we're not told exactly.

Possibly it was just pay off the debts she'd accumulated since her lovers didn't provide for her like they promised.

She might've been sold into slavery but experts just don't know enough about the customs at the time to know why that might've happened.

Or perhaps she was a shrine prostitute.

What we do know is that if she was a slave, it would've been unusual for Hosea to with money and grain.

The usual price for a slave was thirty pieces of silver, not fifteen.

Presumably he didn't have enough and so he had to make up the difference with a large quantity of grain – about 300L worth!

This was expensive, costing him a lot.

I wonder if, like I did, you wonder how Gomer would've felt about all of this?

It really sounds like she doesn't have a choice in the whole matter.

Was she in fear of what Hosea was going to do with her?

It's hard to know for sure, but it's likely she realised that she was getting a good deal.

She gets to come back and live as his wife with all the dignity that goes with that.

Presumably she's realised at this point that she was better off with her husband than being with the other men.

However, there was a condition that she'd to live in faithfully with him.

She have to prove that she'd be faithful to him before he's going to be completely committed to her though.

There's a time of probation.

“And I said to her, ‘Many days you shall remain with me, and you shall neither prostitute yourself nor be with any man, and then I shall be yours.’”

This mirrors what will happen with the Israelites.

They'll live for a period of time "*without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods.*"

All four of those things could be used in worship to Baal and most of them – except household gods – could be used in worship of Yahweh.

There's going to be a time when they won't get to choose who they worship because they were in exile.

Afterwards, the Israelites will return though.

They'll seek Yahweh as their God, following King David's descendent.

Remember that Israel was split into two kingdoms?

This means that they're going to be united with Judah again, following David's descendent as king.

That phrase that's often repeated in 1 Kings won't be heard anymore: "*He followed completely the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat.*"³

Of course, the person he's talking about is Jesus!

In the last days, all of God's people will be united in following him.

The opposite of love is putting ourselves at the centre – self-centredness and pride.

Love puts the other person first.

God's love is so great that he promises a new future – a new day – not just for good people, but for people who stray.

There will be a new day for those who stray.

Conclusion

The gospel is God's love story.

It shows us his endless, matchless and unfathomable love for his people.

It's impossible to really compare God's love and describe how good it is.

Even when we'd give up, God's love remains steady.

We can remain steady because of God's love.

God's love isn't extinguished by our failure.

¹ Joshua 7

² Genesis 9:9

³ e.g. 1 Kings 16:26

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Hosea 2:14-3:5

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Big Question: Can God still love us, even when we've failed him?

Big Idea: God's love isn't extinguished by our failure.

Discussion Questions

1. Is there anything we can do to stop God loving us?
2. What is the opposite of love?
3. Why is the "therefore" in verse 14 somewhat surprising?
4. Why does God take his people to the wilderness?
5. What is the "day" (vv.16, 18 & 21) that God is speaking about?
6. How do you think Hosea felt when God spoke to him in verse one?
7. How do you expect Gomer felt?
8. What does this passage teach us about faithfulness in marriage?
9. What will the spiritual effect on the Israelites be?