

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 25: Real judgment, amazing restoration

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The word “spiritual” is remarkably popular today. We live among people who largely have refused to listen to God, search for him or seek to know him. The consistent features of worldly spirituality are positive affirmation and the absence of judgment. No wonder its message is inviting. Tragically, however, worldly spirituality, in all its forms, makes no contact with the living God of the universe.

How then does God speak to those who listen to him? The Bible chronicles such communication. The full picture of the Lord’s message often goes unrealized. Often upon hearing the first strains of judgment, people quickly stop listening. Yet those who listen to God experience the transformation in his message.

God packages words of judgment with affirmations of love and offers of salvation. Those who stop listening miss out on God’s tremendous offer. God’s covenant commitment bound his heart to his people. Their ups and downs have profound effect on him. The Lord hurts for his people (Hosea 11:8).

Hosea’s unique feature is his marriage to an adulterous wife (1:2) and his redemption and restoration to her (3:1). Such is way the Lord’s way with Israel, his beloved people who have committed spiritual adultery by serving other gods. God loves his people so deeply he cannot let them go and is compelled to be restored to them.

Verse 1:3 describes Hosea's marriage to Gomer and her delivering a son to Hosea. The wording of the text indicates the next two children (vv. 6 & 8) were not fathered by Hosea. The three children receive symbolic names. Jezreel (v. 4) indicates God will end the kingdom of Israel just as a former royal dynasty was terminated. Lo-Ruhamah (v. 6) means God no longer will show love to Israel because she has abandoned the covenant of love. The daughter's name possibly is the worst you could give to a woman, being so far away from names like Desiree (desired one) and Amy (beloved one), and many other similar feminine names. The name Lo-Ammi (v. 9) declares Israel is no longer God's people because she deserted the covenant.

Lo-Ammi generates the most important message. Because Israel abandoned its position as the Lord's people, God will make an unexpected move. Verse 10 (echoed in 2:23) promises unknown people will take Israel's place. The Apostle Paul seized these verses to explain the broadening of God's offer of salvation through Christ Jesus to all people. God will find people who are willing to take the place Israel vacated.

Chapter 2 delivers an oracle based on the imagery of Hosea's marital situation. From the children's names spring concepts that bracket (see vv. 1 & 23) God's message to Israel. Verse 1 reverses the meaning of the two younger children as God appeals to "his people" whom "he loves." God desires not to sever ties with Israel. He deeply cares for her. He chooses to continue with his people. Because of these sentiments, he calls his people to return to him.

Verses 2-8 describe Israel: She ignores her status as a wife, focuses on adulterous activity and refuses to acknowledge the Lord's provision. Verses 9-13 say God's judgment on Israel is to withhold his provision. Such was his covenant obligation, but God cannot blindly support wayward living. Eventually Israel will cease all religious activity, because she will have nothing for which to give thanks.

Marvelously, chapter 2 does not end with verse 13. Verses 14-15 state the Lord will speak tenderly to Israel and she will respond. Awakened by the absence of God's provisions, the Israelites will respond God's compassion. Verses 16-20 describe Israel's transformation and return to the Lord. Verse 20 counterbalances verses 8 and 13. Verses 21-23 show the Lord will react positively to Israel's return.

Chapter 2 demonstrates that God's judgment has a redemptive purpose. Those who focus solely on messages of judgment do not fully understand or represent the purpose of judgment in God's message. God wants his people to be restored to him, not perish (hence Hosea 2:23; compare John 3:16-18). The phrases "You are my people" and "You are my God" in verse 23 are the core covenant declarations between God and Israel. Both parties should fulfill their declarations. Israel has fallen short, but restoration is available to those who participate.

Chapter 3 illustrates God's desire to be restored to Israel through Hosea's real life restoration to Gomer. God's command radically contrasts with the way of the world which both practices adultery and condemns those who practice it. God, however, rises above the human tragedy by reaching into damaged lives and inspiring a new heart connection by showing uncommon love. Verse 3 seems harsh, but the point is that Hosea will win Gomer's heart by his uncommon love and faithful devotion to her. If Gomer was a woman looking for true love, it has come to her. It was, in fact, available to her all along.

Harsh, condemning, dismissing words of judgment constitute the world's message for wayward, errant people. Because God is just, he must address sinfulness. Yet because he loves his people, he provides salvation and restoration.

People would be fools to refuse restoration with the Lord. God calls our hearts. Amazing restoration to him awaits. Let us not quit listening when

we hear words judgment, because with God, this is only the beginning of his message—one that ends with grand words of restoration.