

There's some unrest among the atheists. This week the original group putting on that event at the Civic Center broke apart. The main guy didn't want to be a part of the group anymore. He contacted the Civic Center, told them the Satanist event was off. Quickly the rest of the leaders got together and formed a new Satanist atheist organization. The event is still on.

So obviously these Satanists are lost forever, right? They've turned away from God so far that God couldn't possibly love them. Maybe he never did. What about the people who put the billboard up along I-44 near State Fair Park? The one that says if you don't know God you should join the club. God probably doesn't care about those people, right? They're too far gone. And what about prostitutes, politicians, or people like Stephen Hawking, are these people who have separated themselves from God loved by him?

If they're lost, how far is God willing to go to win them back? God must really love because there are some rotten ones. And where do I fit? I'm not as bad as some, but I've done my fair share. And if I'm part of God's family how should I look at others? Do I get to be all self-righteous thinking I'm better than people like the Satanists who want to make fun of God? Let's look at the first lesson. In the story presented we see that...

God loves them that much
Seen in the reconciliation of Hosea's marriage
Seen in Hosea's relationship

We expect a connection to God will affect our life. What we don't expect is to have our life used as a picture for the rest of the world to understand God. When Hosea was asked to do something beyond incredible that's just what happened. **"The Lord said to me, 'Go, show your love to your wife again.'"** Again? It seems natural to love your wife. Hosea had been instructed by God to take this particular wife. He was to marry her, love her, and have children with her. But Gomer, that's Hosea's wife, had some skeletons in the closet.

Gomer was unfaithful. She went around with other men, got involved with idol worship even to the point of ritualistically giving her body in sexual ways. This was not someone to mother children. Yet God says that when Hosea takes her back he will picture how God takes back the people of Israel. **"Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods..."** The Israelites had been unfaithful to God. They pursued relationships with false gods. They created idols from nothing, sacrificed themselves to these idols of wood and stone, and gave their bodies to them. They put other things into the top spot, the spot that only God should occupy.

In effect, the people of Israel committed adultery in their relationship with God. And it wasn't hard to do. The Israelites lived not really having to fight for their freedoms and rights. They were at peace from war and persecution. It left plenty of time for them to get mixed up in other things and slide spiritually and morally. Now, you don't really have to fight for your freedom or rights either. No one is attacking or persecuting you. You have little to worry about. So it can make it really easy to slide other things into your number one priority slot. And when you do you cheat on God. God deserves to be number one, not sports. God wants you to trust him not your money. God wants you to please him not yourself. And God doesn't want you looking at others thinking they're worse and you're okay.

As commanded, Hosea bought the wife that should've been with him and loving only him back. And no matter what he was to love her again as he did before. This pictures your relationship with God. You should've been with God. You should've loved him. Instead you've been a slave to sin. But God bought you back. He left the 99 and came to find you who were lost. **"The grace of our Lord was poured out on me [on you] abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."** God didn't simply sweep your sin under the rug or ignore it. He paid for it with Jesus' blood. God's deep tracking love won you and wooed you. We're totally unworthy yet worth it to God.

God watches an entire planet everyday desert him. You and I get torn up with heartache when a boyfriend starts to date someone else or a spouse has eyes for someone else. These situations help us in a small way understand the full depth of God. When humanity deserts God, he still cares, every single day. Hosea took Gomer back. God took the Israelites back after they left him. We start to see and know God's love. And God's love for us changes our attitude about others. These are people Jesus was willing to die for, people God wants to save. We know God loves them, so we love them, no matter who they are or what they've done. And we rejoice like the angels in heaven rejoice over one sinner who is saved through Jesus.

It would have been foolish for the relationship between Hosea and Gomer to return to the way it had been. Hosea, under instruction from the Lord, set new ground rules this time. **"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."** First, she couldn't get involved with any other men, obviously. But she couldn't even be intimate with her husband. They would for a time not engage in the physical bond of marriage. Isolation seen in Hosea's relationship would show how much God loves them.

Israel, like Gomer, had it easy for a long time. But things changed. In Hosea's relationship God showed that the Israelites were off to a period of isolation in Babylon that would last a while but not forever. They wouldn't have national pride to fall back on while captives. They also wouldn't have any religion, true or false. God was teaching that their actions didn't save them, he did.

Sin separates us from God and has consequences. Part of those consequences might be God isolating us for a time. As we push true religion away, he might take it away leaving us feeling helpless. We might lose the freedom of religion or the threat of persecution might return. Once isolated, we may think consequences for our sins are the part we have to pay for heaven. If we feel guilty for telling a lie its good because that's our contribution to our being saved. Or if I was fired that's the least I deserve to show God just how sorry I am for cheating the company. Those thoughts isolate us further from God. We've got no hope on our own.

When Gomer came out of isolation the hope was she would again return to loving her husband. After Israel came out of captivity the hope was they would be drawn back to the Lord. Could discipline from God be a good thing? **"They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessing in the last days."** Discipline we experience is goodness from God. We flee to his promises. We're brought together under our Savior. We look forward to the last days when Christ will come to take us home permanently.

There are plenty of lost people out there trying to earn their way to God doing exactly what we used to do. Rejoice that God loves these enough to go after them. And then go after them. When we notice others lost it can be our opportunity to witness to them and share our faith stories. Others who we notice trying to work their way to God need to hear that they can't do it. They need the Savior, and God loves them and has provided. He's the Savior who provides full and free forgiveness by his grace for us and for them.

There will always be people that look like they're lost forever. But we remember that we too looked like that at one time. How God treated us as shown in the example of Hosea's marriage relationship demonstrates that God cares deeply for us. But he also cares for all people. Christ paid with his life on the cross to buy us and all people back from our sinful condition. No one in this world is lost for good. We must continue to go after these people. We must continue to show them the love of God. We know God loves them that much in Christ.