

Betrothed to God—Forever!

Hosea 2:19-20 (Read 2:2-23)

Halifax: 3 September 2017, 10:30 AM

Introduction

Today we have a special service with the public welcome of new members and the baptism of two covenant children.

- For this reason, I am going to break from our regular sermon series and preach a special sermon about God's gracious acceptance of us and our children...
 - not only as His people—but even as His spouse.
 - It is beyond belief that He should take us as His spouse!

It seems that throughout the pages of Scripture,

- Our gracious Lord is constantly piling up analogies and descriptions and illustrations to express to us what He has done to restore our relationship with Him.
 - We are dull in our understanding, and He wants to help us to grasp the wonder of His grace to us in Jesus Christ.
 - It is much more marvellous than we think it is.
 - He speaks of washing us, renewing us, forgiving us, restoring us, calling us, saving us, rescuing us, delivering us, dying for us, redeeming us, pouring out His Spirit on us, changing our hearts, drawing us to Himself, making us His people, becoming our God, finding us, feeding us, giving us the water of life, bringing us into the truth, setting His love on us, adopting us as His children, taking us as His servants, giving us new life, reconciling us, receiving us into His kingdom, and on and on the list goes!
- But today we are going to look at one particular way that He describes His relationship with us—
 - and that is that He has betrothed us to Himself again even after we behaved as an adulterous wife.
 - That's right, God describes His church as an adulterous woman that He takes back again to be His wife after she had given herself to other men.

This is the subject of the prophecy of Hosea...

- You can find this book in your Bible toward the end of the Old Testament, just after the book of Daniel.
 - It is the first of the twelve shorter prophecy books that are called the minor prophets which come just before the New Testament.
 - This particular book was written just over 700 years before Jesus came.

Please give me your attention as I read it to you now, keeping in mind that this is not the word of man, but the word of God that effectively works in all who believe.

- I will begin in Hosea chapter 2, verse 2.
- I will make comments as we go along,
 - and before we even begin, I want to explain that when God speaks of us as His wife, He is speaking of the whole church.

- He has but one bride, though she is made up of many people—first from the believing patriarchs like Seth and Methuselah and Noah and Abraham;
 - and then from the nation of Israel in particular;
 - and now from believers spread throughout the whole world.
- All of them together make up His church which is His bride.
 - This is what He said to us in the time of Hosea:

Hosea 2:2-23: “Bring charges against your mother, bring charges; for she is not My wife, nor am I her Husband! [Notice how the children are the ones who are addressed here, and how the Lord declares that He is no longer her husband] **Let her put away her harlotries from her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts; ³ lest I strip her naked and expose her, as in the day she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and slay her with thirst.** [God was the one who was providing for her, but she gave credit for that to her adulterous lovers. And notice with verse 4 how the children are judged with their mother because they have been brought forth not for God, but for her lovers] **⁴ I will not have mercy on her children, for they are the children of harlotry. ⁵ For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has behaved shamefully. For she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my linen, my oil and my drink.’** [See how she credits them with her care? That makes God decide to take away her provisions] **⁶ Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and wall her in, so that she cannot find her paths. ⁷ She will chase her lovers, but not overtake them; yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, for then it was better for me than now.’ ⁸ For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold—which they prepared for Baal. ⁹ Therefore I will return and take away My grain in its time and My new wine in its season, and will take back My wool and My linen, given to cover her nakedness. ¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall deliver her from My hand.** [God will expose her for what she

is without Him] **¹¹ I will also cause all her mirth to cease, her feast days, her New Moons, her Sabbaths—all her appointed feasts.** [During the exile, she would no longer have her religious feasts] **¹² And I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, of which she has said, ‘These are my wages that my lovers have given me.’ So I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. ¹³ I will punish her for the days of the Baals [her Baals are her idols] to which she burned incense. She decked herself with her earrings and jewelry, and went after her lovers; but Me she forgot,” says the LORD.** [So there is the tragedy. The people that God had redeemed and married had forgotten Him and gone after idols. God has cut her off (with the exile of the northern tribes); but look... it is with plans to woo her back again!] **¹⁴ “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, will bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfort to her. ¹⁵ I will give her her vineyards from there, and the Valley of Achor as a door of hope; she shall sing there, as in the days of her youth, as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt. ¹⁶ And it shall be, in that day,” says the LORD, “that you will call Me ‘My Husband,’ [ish-ee], and no longer call Me ‘My Master,’ [baal-ee], ¹⁷ For I will take from her mouth the names of the Baals, and they shall be remembered by their name no more. ¹⁸ In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely.** [In other words, as the God who controls nature and nations, He will start providing for them and protecting them. And now with verse 19, we get to our main text:] **¹⁹ I will betroth you to Me forever** [to betroth is to make a covenant of marriage with

them—a covenant that was fully binding]; **yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, In lovingkindness and mercy;** ²⁰ **I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD.** ²¹ **It shall come to pass in that day *that I will answer,***” says the LORD; **“I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth.** ²² **The earth shall answer with grain, with new wine, and with**

oil; they shall answer Jezreel. ²³ **Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on *her who had not obtained mercy;*** [Before, God had named one of Hosea’s children “not mercy”... and another one “not my people,” but that will be reversed:] **then I will say to *those who were not My people,* ‘You are My people!’ And they shall say, ‘You are my God!’ ”**

May the Lord bless the reading of His holy Word.

So you see in this passage how the Lord comes to His people who have been committing spiritual adultery and promises to betroth them to Himself again!

- The only reason the church has a relationship with the Lord as His bride is not because we deserve it, but because He has pursued us in mercy.
- Even to this day, the church is full of sin—
 - we commit spiritual adultery because abandon the Lord who is our husband and follow the world, our own sinful desires, and the ways of the devil.
 - If the church stood on the basis of our own deeds, we would be cut off, but we do not.
- The time of our history as God’s bride that we are looking it in Hosea is the time when God cast us out for our adulteries under the Old Covenant.
 - We were driven from the land that He gave us and given over to the world.
 - This history is given to us to teach us that the basis of our relationship as His bride is not on account of our own goodness, but only by His mercy and grace.

I draw your attention now to my primary text, verse 19-20, where we have the beautiful, gracious promise of God for His adulterous church:

- **Hosea 2:19-20: I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy;** ²⁰ **I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD.**

I. Notice how He says “I will betroth you to me” three times!

- There is good reason for this!
 - A. Because it is hard to believe that God our Maker would be our Husband!
 1. He is the self-existing God who called the world into being by the breath of His power.
 - In His divine essence, He is a pure spirit and is not a part of this creation—for He made it out of nothing.
 - There is more difference between Him and us than there is between us and a worm—for He is the creator and we are creatures.
 2. And yet, He enters into a relationship with His people—His church—that is so intimate and so secure that He calls us His betrothed wife.
 - Let me mention that betrothal was something like engagement for us, but much more than that.

- It was an engagement with binding vows which if broken would be counted as adultery—betrothed persons were called husband and wife.
 - Even though the marriage was not consummated until a later time at the wedding, it was still considered marriage.
 - We could think of the picture here as that we are betrothed to God now and that the wedding will occur when Christ returns at the last day.
 - Then we will have the wedding feast and will move into His house
3. But how could it be that the creature should enter into a relationship so intimate that we should be called His wife and that He should be called our husband!
- It is so unbelievable that He repeats it three times!
- But there is a second reason that this needs to be repeated three times!
- God had already betrothed Israel to Him before, so they knew about that...He had also referred to them as His son and as His redeemed people...
- B. But what is even harder to believe that He is here betrothing us again after we had abandoned our marriage to Him by repeated cases of adultery.
1. I speak carefully when I say that *we* had committed adultery.
- I would stress that God does not have different churches or different brides.
 - He has one church, and one bride that grows up before Him through the generations of world history.
 - We are not complete until the last day when Jesus returns to take us into His house.
 - So understand that whatever God did with Israel is what He did with the one church that we are a part of,
 - part of the church is in the grave now, part of the church is alive in the world, and part of it is yet to be born...but it is one church.
 - This is a hard concept for us moderns to grasp, but it will open up the scriptures greatly for you if you understand and accept this.
 - It is very important to see that we are one body in Jesus Christ.
2. And what do we learn about the church from the time of Hosea?
- a. We learn of how wicked we truly are...
- God had made a covenant with us in which He had promised to be our God and to save us from our sins,
 - and in which He gave us a land where we were to serve Him by keeping the rituals where animals were slaughtered on the altar to show us that death is required to atone for our sin...
 - But instead of delighting to serve Him, we had, as we have seen, gone after other gods.
- b. It had come to the point that God was now cutting us off!
- We utterly failed—we were so reprehensible that God was beginning, at the time of Hosea, to drive us out of the land...
 - Eventually the very temple would be destroyed and the unfaithful kings who were supposed to represent Christ would be cut off.
 - As a brazen harlot, we could no longer be God's bride.

3. But here the Lord is telling us that He is going to betroth us again!
 - a. How could this be true?
 - He is a holy God, of purer eyes than to behold evil.
 - He hates sin and He is to sinners a consuming fire.
 - How could we be His bride when we had shown such wickedness even after being taken by sheer mercy into His house to start with?
 - Betroth us after all of this?
 - Surely there must be some mistake!
 - b. But no—the Lord repeats it three times to us—to His adulterous wife—to make it certain...
 - I will betroth you to Me—forever...
 - I will betroth you to Me—in righteousness and in justice and in lovingkindness and in mercy...
 - I will betroth you to Me—in faithfulness and you will know Me!

TRANS> What grace is this!

II. Look with me at what this promise of betrothal entails.

- **Look with me and marvel!**

A. The first time He says it, He says, “I will betroth you to Me forever!”

1. The word *forever* points us to the fundamental difference between the old covenant and the new covenant.
 - God’s dealing with His church in history involves two covenants—
 - what we have before Christ in the Old Testament or old covenant
 - and what we have after Christ in the New Testament or new covenant.
 - And all the way through, the old covenant is described as temporary, and the new covenant is described as forever.
 - When God promises the new covenant, He says that it will not be like the old covenant which we broke.
 - The reason the old covenant was breakable was because it consisted of rituals that pointed to what Christ was going to do.
 - It was never meant to be permanent.
 - Israel was given a temple with requirements to offer sacrifices in the prescribed way that were pictures of what God would do through Christ.
 - There were various washings that represented the giving of the Holy Spirit to change the hearts of God’s people.
 - And there were kings and priests that were anointed and represented the anointed one (the Messiah) who was to come.
 - These kings and priests lived and died, but the promised Messiah was to live forever.
 - And when it came to betrothal, God had a ritual house in the land where the people lived as His spouse,
 - But it was not His eternal house in heaven—only a ritual house.

2. And one of the purposes for the old covenant was Israel's failure (our failure).
 - God wanted to show us that the basis of our relationship had to be on what He did for us in Christ, not on our own works.
 - For this reason, He showed us that we could not even keep up ritual requirements—how much less could we do what was actually required!
 - And so it was that our first betrothal—the ritual betrothal failed.
 - We were driven from the land and from God's house.
 - Our priests failed and our kings failed.
 - But God used this failure to highlight what He had promised all along...
 - That He was going to make a new covenant with us.
 - That He would provide a son of righteousness to be our king and our priest forever.
 - That he would provide a sacrifice that would actually take away our sins forever so that they would be remembered no more.
 - That He would betroth us to Himself—forever!
 - The church under the old covenant failed and its leaders failed...
 - But the church once established in Jesus Christ under the new covenant can never fail!
3. What security there is for us and our children!
 - When the people turned from God in Hosea's day, their children became the children of harlotry—the whole church was cut off...
 - But under the new covenant, that will never happen again!
 - Both we and our children have a church that will never again fail!
 - Yes, individuals who are in the church under the new covenant can certainly be cut off because of unbelief...
 - It happens all the time.
 - But the church as a whole is completely and totally secure and will never ever fail again—she is betrothed forever!

TRANS> But what is it that makes this betrothal under the new covenant so permanent and secure?

- God tells us when He repeats the promise of betrothal in verse 19...
- B. The second time, He says, "I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy."
- First, let's look at betrothal in righteousness and justice.
 1. Betrothal in *righteousness and justice* means that the bride will truly be cleansed from her defilement—
 - not just ritually as before, but by the sacrifice of God's own Son.
 - a. You see, for the sinful church to be betrothed to God, we had to be cleansed from our sins—we had to be purified.

- And that's what all the rituals of the Old Testament were for.
 - But they were only symbolic.
 - In other words, they did not really purify us in righteousness and justice.
 - The blood of bulls and goats could not take away our sins.
- b. Something more—much more was required!
- For God's righteousness to be satisfied, His bride had to be purified by nothing less than the sacrifice of God's own Son!
 - Our sin, because it is against God, calls for eternal punishment.
 - And nobody could bear that but the Son of God.
- c. So when God says that He is going to betroth us in righteousness and justice, He is declaring that He will provide what is required to take away our sins!
- Hear what the scripture says about Jesus.
 - Gal 3:13-14 says: **Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"),¹⁴ that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.**
 - And Hebrews 9:11-12 declares: **But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation.¹² Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.**
 - Righteousness and justice had not been satisfied until Christ died.
 - It is by His stripes that we are healed.
 - Without the shedding of His blood, there is no remission of sins.
 - At the Lord's Table He declares to us that His blood is the blood of the new covenant, shed for the remission of sins.
 - All the ceremonies of the old covenant are now abolished and we trust in Christ Jesus who was crucified for us.
 - Yes, God gave His Son to die in our place so that we who could not be justified by keeping the law are justified by faith in Him.
 - And so it is that now under the new covenant, the church has been forever betrothed to God.
 - The foundation of our acceptance is Jesus Christ and His sacrifice.
 - Justice has been satisfied and righteousness has been procured for the adulterous bride of Christ and she is forever cleansed.
 - She stands before God with Christ as her righteousness and unless that righteousness can be abolished (and it certainly cannot) she is betrothed forever.
 - Individuals in the church who do not have faith are not justified, but the church itself and all who believe can never again fail their husband.

2. But you will notice that it also says that we are betrothed in lovingkindness and mercy...
 - These words are added to emphasise that the provision Christ has made for His bride is given in love and mercy by the Father Himself.
 - Lovingkindness translates the word that is used to refer to God's covenant love in the Old Testament—*hesed*.
 - It is translated steadfast love or faithful love or sometimes mercy.
 - It speaks of the covenanted love of God that He would provide for us. This covenanted love is expressed by Him sending Jesus Christ to provide for us.
 - And of course this is all done in mercy—the other word that is used here to say that we are betrothed in mercy.
 - This speaks of pure compassion—of what is done by a superior for a helpless inferior who has no claim or right to his help.
 - We were justly condemned, but God has acted in sheer mercy to redeem us.
 - If He had left us all to perish in our sins, we would have only received what we truly deserve.
 - Of course we do not easily believe that, but it is the truth according to God's word.
 - His salvation is all of mercy and we ought to love Him as our husband who has so graciously provided for us.
3. What security there is to know that our betrothal is all of His free love and mercy and not based on our own goodness.
 - It is freely provided and freely bestowed in order that we might be His bride forever!

➤ And then we have the third repetition of the promise of God...

C. He says "I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness and you shall know the Lord."

- This is a tremendous reinforcement to what we have already seen!
 - The word *faithfulness* has at its root the word *amen*.
1. The idea here is that just as the atonement is no longer a ritual atonement, the betrothal is no longer a mere ritual betrothal.
 - a. We are truly betrothed to Him now.
 - b. We have true union with Him.
 - No longer does He have a symbolic presence with us at a temple with a cloud...
 - But now we are actually joined to Him as one flesh—we are the very body of Christ and His Spirit dwells in us forever.
 - And we are able to come before the holy presence of God because Christ has opened the way for us forever and He is there...
 - Our prayers and our worship come directly before the Father, and the day is coming when we will see the glory that Christ had with Him before the foundation of the world.

- c. And we are promised that we will live in that house in a new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells when the great wedding occurs at the end of the age.
 - Our husband will purify us from sin and deliver us from death and free us from all our enemies.
 - What is symbolically spoken of in Hosea with restored clothing and crops and protection will be ours in full faithfulness and truth in the new heavens and the new earth.
2. And the best part of this is that now we know the Lord!
- Yes, we knew Him and He was revealed to us under the old covenant, but how much more under the new covenant!
 - Now we are betrothed in truth and we understand His holiness and goodness and love like never before!
 - There is a deeper intimacy and access for us by the Holy Spirit.
 - Jesus Christ has revealed the Father to us so that we have seen Him.
 - John the Baptist was the greatest of the prophets of the old covenant in that he had the fullest revelation of God...
 - But Jesus said that the least in the kingdom of God is greater than John...for we have seen what God did in Christ for our salvation.
 - And it only gets better—when Jesus returns, we will be presented as His bride and we will live with Him forever in His father’s house.
 - We will see the glory that He had with the Father from before the foundation of the world and we will love as He loves in that house.

III. Now my dear friends, let me urge you all to embrace Christ as your husband!

- A. As we have seen today, the whole church is betrothed to God.
1. Jesus is the mediator who has come to connect us to the Father’s house.
 - He is the head of the whole church.
 - He has secured the pardon of the entire body by His sacrifice for us.
 2. With Him as our head, we can never fail.
 - The church will never fail again as it did when the kings and priests of Israel were leading it.
 - Now all things are secured to us in Jesus Christ.
- B. But let me plead with you all—you must come to Christ if you wish to be saved.
1. If you are yet outside the church, let me urge you to come in at once.
 - To enter, you must confess your sins and your need of Christ’s sacrifice.
 - You must profess that you are trusting in Him alone for your salvation, and of course you must come to follow Him as His bride—
 - to come to Him as one who wants to live in His house under His rule and authority forever and ever...
 - not that you will do that perfectly in this world—but that you are seeking to do so despite your failures and are desirous to do so.

- To enter the church that is the bride of Christ, you must profess all of that and be baptised,
 - showing that you are looking to Him for the cleansing that He has provided for His bride—
 - His death on the cross to atone for our sins and the Holy Spirit to change our hearts for obedience.
- That is how one properly enters the church.
2. But if you have come in, then be sure that your profession is true—that you are not lying!
- There are many in the church who have been baptised and who have professed that they are trusting Christ and submitted to Him who are nothing of the kind.
 - They have never really come to face their sin and their need of His sacrifice.
 - They are not really trusting in Him as crucified to atone for their sin.
 - Nor are they really interested in following Him in more than an outward conformity—they've never been born of His Spirit.
 - If that is you, then you will be among those who are in the visible church that are cast out on the day of judgment if not before...
 - What a dreadful thing it will be for you to have been so near, and yet to have never truly embraced Christ and His salvation.
 - Your punishment will be far worse than those who have never heard because you are among those who despised the blood of the covenant by which the church is sanctified.
 - You were among us, but you were never really of us.
3. And parents, I also have a word for you—know that God has not only included you, but also your children with you in the church.
- Yes, even before your children are of sufficient understanding and maturity to profess their faith as individuals,
 - Our gracious God has welcomed them into His covenant with their parents.
 - Throughout the Bible, He declares that the promise is to us and to our children.
 - The children that we bear as His betrothed bride are not children of harlotry, but His children.
 - When Israel was cut off, the children were cut off too—but when the church was restored in Christ, our children are restored too.
 - They are part of the body of the church.
 - Must they also profess their faith?
 - Of course they must when they are of sufficient understanding and maturity to do so—and even before that in their own childlike way...
 - But our gracious husband declares that our children are His children until they prove otherwise by denying Him in faith or works.

- That means that you can give them the sign of baptism,
 - And declare to them how Christ has accepted us as His bride *forever...*
 - And how He has betrothed us...in righteousness and justice, in lovingkindness and mercy...and in faithfulness so that we know Him.
 - Bring them up under the promises of His covenant with joy and pray that they will never depart from Him.

Conclusion

- What a wonderful Saviour He is!
- What a wonderful husband He is!
- How secure we are as His bride—forever accepted with our children in His Father's house because of Him.