

You get to have a cup of coffee with one person from the Bible – you get to sit down, chat, ask questions with one person from the pages of Holy Scripture. The choice is yours. Who are you picking? (Other than Jesus (that’s too easy), you have to pick someone other than Jesus) What is the one biblical person you would pick to sit down and have coffee with?

While you are thinking, I’ll tell you my pick.

There are a few names that rise to the top. You’ve got Paul (the author of some of my favorite books of the Bible), or Moses (a man who got to see some of the biggest events of the Bible play out), or Jacob (my namesake).

But, there’s a dark horse that enters the race for me when I think about who I’d like to meet from the Bible. I still remember the first time I was captivated by this man’s story back in college. The man I might choose if I was feeling like going a little different direction: Hosea.

What do you know about the prophet Hosea?

Can I tell you why he makes my list?

The Bible is full of metaphors. The pages of the Bible are full of object lessons that help us better understand ourselves and this world and most importantly our relationship with the God who created us. It is full of metaphors to help us understand big, important Biblical ideas and themes like sin and grace and justification and sanctification.

Some metaphors in the Bible resonate better with us, in our culture, in our time, in our setting, for each of us individually than others.

There is one Biblical metaphor that really resonates with me. Every time I come across this particular metaphor it captures my attention and imagination and helps me wrap my mind and heart around some very important Biblical truths.

This particular metaphor is most often seen in God’s Old Testament prophets. It’s a metaphor that is a key part of that section from Isaiah I read a bit ago. It’s a metaphor that Hosea lived – that’s why he’s my dark horse.

It is a metaphor that helps us understand two of the biggest, most foundational concepts of the Bible – sin and grace.

Can I tell you about Hosea, and connect it to Isaiah 62, and then apply it to you?

God comes to a man named Hosea a little more than 700 years before Jesus and says, “Hosea, I’m going to use you, and your personal life as one big metaphor. Hosea, I want you to get married. But this isn’t going to be a ‘happily ever after’ kind of marriage. Hosea, I want you to go out and marry the kind of woman that you know is going to cheat on you. I want you to marry a woman that you know will not be faithful to you.”

Can you imagine that? Can you imagine committing yourself to wife who, based on her personal history, is going to fill your life with the sadness and heartbreak of unfaithfulness in marriage? Can you imagine that?

The story of Hosea plays out – he finds a woman named Gomer, they get married, have a few kids, and she doesn’t disappoint in the adultery arena. At one point God has to tell the cuckolded Hosea to go out and “**show love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adulteress.**” So Hosea goes out and *buys* his wife back from another man for a load of silver and barley.

Can you imagine what Hosea’s life was like?! It’s crazy, isn’t it?!

Why in the world would God want that for Hosea? What’s the metaphor?

God tells us: Hosea, “**take yourself an adulterous wife... because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the LORD.**”

“Hosea I want your marriage to an unfaithful woman to be a giant object lesson in what it is like to be me – a faithful God, trying to have a relationship with such an unfaithful people.”

It’s, for me personally, maybe the most powerful metaphor for sin in the Bible. It helps me understand the nature of my sin. It helps me understand my sin in a graphic, tangible way – Sin as adultery.

It’s a metaphor lived out by Hosea – it is the main metaphor, unmentioned, but assumed in Isaiah 62.

Sin is adultery.

When the Israelites, God’s chosen people, chased after pleasure, and joy, and success in other places, God was Hosea. God felt all of the hurt, anger, and disgust of a man whose wife was chasing after pleasure and joy with another man.

When we (the bride of Christ, the one’s God has promised to love with an everlasting love) sin, it’s like a woman leaving her loving husband at home and shacking up with someone else. The pleasure and joy that our God offers us is not enough. No, we want to rut around and give ourselves to other things in the hope that those will bring us the pleasure and joy we think we are lacking with God.

I know it is a graphic metaphor – so graphic, I’m trying to be very careful with my words because there are younger ears here today.

I know it is a graphic metaphor. In my opinion, the most graphic chapter of the entire Bible is a longer explanation of this particular metaphor (sin as adultery). If you really want to wrap your mind around the metaphor of sin as adultery, go read Ezekiel 16. You’ll never think of sin (the sin of the Israelites, or your own sin) the same way again.

I know it’s graphic, but I love it.

I love it because even though I was raised going to church, even though I've known my whole life how much Jesus loves me, even though it is my full time job to learn of my God's faithful love for me, I realize that I'm really good at excusing, or downplaying my unfaithfulness to him.

I can act selfishly to my wife and kids and excuse it all day long. I can come to an unflattering snap judgement about another person without batting an eye. My heart can be filled with discontented thoughts day in and day out and I hardly think twice about it. Words, hurtful words, can flow from my mouth about other people, and I'll *defend* my right to say them.

I guarantee you that every single one of us here today has our own list – a list of things that God calls sin, but your conscience isn't quite as convinced. It's not that big of a deal, right?

I love this metaphor because even if my conscience may not feel all that broken up, even if I'm still trying to make excuses, it helps me see how my God feels.

Every sin. The big sins. The seemingly small sins. Adultery – God walking in on me in the middle of a heartbreakingly disgusting act.

And you know what an unfaithful wife deserves, right?

God gives us some more metaphors to help us wrap our minds around what an unfaithful wife deserves...

For Hosea it was the names of the children he had with his unfaithful wife.

He had a daughter, and God said, "**Call her Lo-Ruhamah** (a name that means *not loved*). Because," God said, "**I will no longer show love to the house of Israel.**"

Then he had a son, and God said, "**Call him Lo-Ammi** (a name that means *not my people*). Because," God said, "**you are not my people, and I am not your God.**"

In Isaiah the names were Azubah – a name that means *forsaken* or *deserted*, and Shemamah – a name that means *desolate*, a *wasteland*.

Unfaithful wives deserve to be thrown out of the house, abandoned, ignored, forsaken.

This, sin as adultery, for me, is the most powerful metaphor for sin in the Bible.

Maybe you're like me and need to be reminded today just how nasty all sin is – even the little sins we tend to excuse or ignore. Maybe some of you don't need that reminder today... maybe the mistakes of your past or the mess of your present won't let you forget much you deserved to be called Lo-Ruhamah. No matter where you are, whether you need to be reminded of the seriousness of all sin or are already crushed by the guilt of your sins, I need you to know that the metaphor doesn't end here. I don't love this metaphor just because it makes me feel really bad about myself. It wouldn't be a metaphor worth loving if that were the case.

Sin as adultery is only one part of the metaphor, not even the most important part. Isaiah only alludes to the "sin as adultery" part of the metaphor because he's busy obsessing over the second, better part of the metaphor.

Part 1 of the metaphor is unfaithfulness and sin, and what that unfaithfulness deserves.

Part 2, God's *actual* response to his unfaithful bride. This metaphor is all about how God treats his unfaithful bride.

God showed part 2 in the life of Hosea. When God told Hosea to go, buy his wife back he said, "**Go, show love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the LORD loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods.**"

Remember the names of those children – *not loved, not my people*? God promised through Hosea, the dad of Lo-Ruhamah and Lo-Ammi, "**I will show my love to the one I called, 'Lo-Ruhamah (not-loved)'. I will say to those called 'Lo-Ammi (not my people)', 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'**"

And in Isaiah... oh, Isaiah helps us to understand, to grasp with our hearts and heads, how did Paul put it in that second Bible reading today... **how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.**

To unfaithful, adulterous people whose sins are so graphically disgusting; to people who deserve to be called Deserted and Desolate, Isaiah sings for joy part 2 of this powerful metaphor.

God says to disgusting adulterers, "**You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God.**"

Think about that. Let that sink in.

Imagine meeting the queen of England, and she takes the crown off her head and gives it to you. Can you imagine how happy you would be? How just floored and blown away you would be? How precious that moment would be? God says to disgusting adulterers like us, "That's how I feel when I get to hold you." Think about that – the juxtaposition of how God should feel (like a man cheated on), versus how he says he actually feels.

God says to his unfaithful bride today, "**You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow... no longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah (which means *my delight is in her*) and your land Beulah (which means *married*); for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.**"

Let that sink in... all the names God should call us, but instead, like a groom on his wedding day... *my delight is in her.*

I married my bride over 8 years ago. I don't remember a ton about that day. Weddings are such crazy, hectic days that fly by in the blink of an eye. One thing I distinctly remember, though, is how my face felt.

My face, my cheeks had this dull aching pain all day long – why? Because I was smiling so much – not just because I had to for the pictures, but because there was my bride, my love, my wife, walking down the aisle. The muscles of my face ached with happiness on my wedding day.

Today God says to me, to you, his unfaithful bride, “That’s how I feel about you. Every ounce of that joy, every ach of that smile, every bit of that happiness is how I feel about you.”

And this, this is why I love this metaphor. Whether you are good at excuse sin, or are crushed under the unforgettable guilt about something you’ve done – or are a mixture of the two, like most of us, your God would have you wrap your heart and head around this – how our faithful God feels about his unfaithful bride.

You are his delight. Like Hosea, he would pay any price to have you back, to hold you, to love you again – even the price of his own son Jesus.

Let that sink in. You have a God who would pay any price to have you back, to hold you, to love you again, even the price of his own son Jesus.

Do you see why I'd welcome a lunch with Hosea?

He lived a metaphor, a metaphor that Isaiah sings about today, a metaphor about me, and unfaithful bride, and my God, a faithful, loving husband.

Dear Christian friends how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ for us. You are his joy, his delight, his bride.

Amen.