

Our Solution Prefigured: Prophets

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[0 : 00] I don't know what you think about profits. Not the kind of profits that you want to have in your bank account, but the ones who kind of speak messages to us.

Because I think actually every one of us in life wants our own profit. The other day I saw, I was walking along, I saw on a bus an advertisement.

And on the advert, I think it's for a tutorial center, there was this guy looking like he was a member of a boy band. And emblazoned next to him on the bus was the title something like, Edwin Wong, he is considered by some to be an exam profit.

And I got thinking, we all want our own profit. If you're in business on the stock market, wouldn't you just love to have a profit who could tell you what was going to happen?

In your family life, for your kids, wouldn't you like to have a profit? Well, in the Bible, there are profits. And these profits are maybe not quite the kind of profits that you might like to have in your life.

[1 : 17] Because these profits didn't just tell you about the future, they told you about what God was like, what God was thinking, and how God felt about his people. They were a bit like an alarm clock.

You know, an alarm clock is very annoying, and you want to turn them off. But actually, you need an alarm clock to wake you up. Otherwise, you won't be able to live. You won't be able to work.

You won't be able to function. At least, if you are like me. But if you were to imagine and to go back in time, into the time when the Bible was written, and you were to look in the Jerusalem classified post, and you were to look at the job description of a prophet, you would see some very unusual, strange things.

You would see things like wanted, wanted, man who can lie on his side, on his left side, for a year, and then turn over and for 40 more days lie on his right side.

You might see wanted, man skilled in cooking bread over human poo. You might see wanted, man who can walk around butt naked for three years.

[2 : 29] Some of you might like to take that one. But these were unusual things that they were asked to do, because prophets were like this alarm clock to Israel, a nation which was slipping and sleeping further and further away from God.

And the prophets came on the scene at the same time as the kings. And if this is your first time here, we've been going through a series looking at the Bible's story, calling it God's story, our story, and seeing what is God up to in the world.

We've seen how God created human beings for relationship with him. Human beings, Adam and Eve, turned away from God. They rejected him. And yet God came again, and he promised a man, Abraham, that he was going to give a people a land and blessing that was going to go to all the nations.

And so God raises up a people, Israel. He releases them from captivity. He brings them to Mount Sinai. He makes this marriage covenant where he says, I want you to be mine. I've rescued you.

I want you in relationship with me. And Israel then continually, time and time again, goes away from God. God continues to be faithful, bringing them into the land that he's promised them.

[3 : 44] He then gives them a king, even though they wanted a king because they were rejecting God. He gives them a good king, David. But then he gives them kings, and he tells them, you must obey me.

You must trust me. You must love me because the way that you live will affect the whole of the nation. Because as goes the kings, goes the rest of the nation. And the problem is, if you know the story, the kings, time and time again, mess up.

They disobey God, and their legacy is destruction in the nation of Israel. The nation splits in two, a bit like North and South Korea, and then the northern kingdom of Israel has 20 wicked kings. And God sends them prophets, like the one we're going to look at today, called, who will light that alarm clock to wake them up to what was happening in their lives. Because they were good at turning their ears off, putting the alarm on snooze function.

And so God had to do some dramatic demonstrations so they could visibly see what he was trying to tell them. So that's what we're going to look at today.

[5 : 00] We're looking at the life of this guy, Hosea, this prophet. Okay? I know some of you say Hosea, but Hosea is the correct way to say it. And we're going to look at it in three parts.

We're going to look at this as a story of marriage. It's a story of a terrible marriage. And it's a story of a cost of restoring this marriage.

Okay? A marriage, a terrible marriage, but a cost of restoring this marriage. So I don't know if you, if you think about an image of God, what comes into your mind?

In the Bible, there's lots of images. There's king, judge, shepherd, father. There's lots of beautiful images. But one of the images that the Bible has of God is that he is a lover.

He is a husband. Here's a couple of verses. Isaiah 54 says, your maker is your husband. In Isaiah 62, it says, and this is beautiful, it says, for as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so the Lord, God, shall rejoice over you.

[6 : 15] Now, if you think about that image, that picture, just for a minute, the images of a wedding day. And I remember, I went to see, I went to one of my friends' weddings.

And, you know, they'd been waiting there for a while. And then, the music played, and the bride started walking down the aisle. And my friend, the groom, was at the front.

And I looked at his face as he looked around to see the bride coming. And I wish I had had a camera at that moment, because his face was just stunned.

He was captivated. He was amazed at the dazzling beauty of his wife. And at that moment, I can imagine that he just wanted to sweep her off her feet and make her his, because that was just his greatest desire at that moment.

The problem was, he had the rest of the ceremony to keep going, so he couldn't do that and express his emotions. But the thing is, that picture is the image of God looking at his relationship with his people.

[7 : 31] Have you ever thought about that? That is his image of how he looks at his people. And we've seen in the story that God was the one who made the first move in this relationship because he wants us to be in this marriage relationship with him.

Now, if you think about it, what's distinctive about a marriage relationship? Because if you're married, you know that being single and being married is quite different. I feel you, brother. Confirmation from the Lord. You see, when I was single, I remember I lived in France for a year and I stayed with this in a person's house and the owner of the house once sat me down very kind of, you know, properly and she looked across at me and said, you know, you really need to get a wife. And, you know, I totally got what she was saying. I mean, I would eat baked beans for breakfast cold straight out of the can. Okay? I'd wear the same t-shirt for a week.

I mean, anyone who knew me would say that getting married for me was a good thing. Okay? And when I did get married, things did begin to change. You know, your sleeping habits, your eating habits, your cooking habits, your dressing habits.

[9 : 02] All your habits begin to change because marriage, and I think most people would say for the better, that marriage shapes you. Marriage is meant to direct the course of your life.

It shapes every aspect of your life. You can't just say, okay, let's do marriage at 10.30 on a Sunday morning, shall we, and then we'll book another appointment a week later.

That's not marriage. Marriage shapes everything in your life, your decisions, the way you think, what you do. It shapes you because marriage becomes your priority, and if your marriage is not your priority, then your spouse will soon tell you that it should be.

That's what our relationship with God is meant to be like. Our relationship with God is not just for a Sunday morning. It's meant to shape every aspect of your life.

But it's not just this aspect. It's also the aspect that marriage is also about intimacy. When you're married, you're known by someone.

[10:10] You see, if someone comes up to me and says, hey, listen, Chris, you're a pretty calm kind of guy. You know, you don't get stressed out so easily. You can just go and talk to my wife, and she will soon tell you all the areas that I get stressed in because I may think, okay, I fooled you guys, okay, but I can't fool my wife.

I can hide from most of you, but I can't hide from her. And there's intimacy because you're known. And more than that, if other people criticize me, you know, someone could come up to me and say, you know, Chris, you're the most stupid guy in the world. And I would say to you, I probably agree with you. Fine. It doesn't bother me. Really, it wouldn't bother me. But if my wife said that to me, that would be devastating because my wife actually really knows me.

Right? Because your wife or your husband has a power that nobody else has over you. But it's not just a power that can damage you.

It's a power that can also bring great healing. Because if all the rest of the world says you are useless, and yet your wife or your husband says, I believe in you, I can keep going.

[11:42] I can carry on. But if all the world says to me, you're amazing, and my wife says to me, you're useless, then I'll think I'm useless. Right? Because marriage is a place that shapes all of your life.

It's a place of intimacy, but it's also a place of great healing and restoration. Because your wife or your husband can speak words into you which can give you the strength to keep going.

And by the way, that's as an aside. Be your wife or your husband's greatest encourager if you are married. Because you should be. Because you have that power in their lives.

And that's what God is saying he wants for each one of us. He wants that relationship where we make him our greatest priority and where we come into that place where we are known by him, where we share our hearts with him and where we can feel safe and secure with him.

Because that's where we get restoration to keep going in life. Well, that's how relationship with God, and this story is going to be going to be going to unpack it is about marriage.

[12:56] But as we get into the story we're going to see it's not just about marriage it's about a terrible marriage. And so let's go and dive into this story a little bit. Because right at the beginning of this guy Hosea's profiting career God basically says to him if you're going to go and deliver my message you need to show people what my heart is like.

And if you want to show people what my heart is like you're going to have to feel what my heart is like. And you're going to feel the agony that I feel over my people.

And so what does God do? He tells him go you see that woman over there Goma I want you to go and marry her. And by the way she slept with more women than you've had hot dinners.

And most of the kids that you're going to have with her they won't be yours. And we don't know if Goma was actually a prostitute or whether she was just promiscuous as the passage says but imagine how Hosea is feeling at this moment.

I mean he's going but I like Linda over there. You know she's got great career prospects my mum really loves her you know but God says marry Goma.

[14:23] I mean imagine him going home and telling his mum you know mum I'm decided that I want to get married and it's to Goma you know the one who goes with anyone.

Imagine her mum's his mum's reaction imagine the family's reaction and yet he marries her and they have their first child together and then the story begins to unfold and I haven't given you all of Hosea 1 but the story basically shows that maybe one night Goma doesn't come home.

She comes back the next morning makes up some lame excuse about where she's been and frequently more and more frequently she's just missing one night two nights three nights and Hosea must have been thinking at this moment what did I get myself into?

Did I do something wrong? Did I hear from God all wrong? Look at who I've married. Some of you maybe know what that's like that sense of betrayal and if you haven't experienced it then you're sure to know somebody who has but it gets worse because she finds that she's pregnant again and Hosea 1 shows us that Hosea it doesn't mention Hosea was the father and imagine Hosea has to bring up two children who are the fruit of his wife's adultery and maybe he's got to do it single-handedly because Goma's off with her latest boyfriend and things are getting worse and worse and chapter two I've just put it in your bulletin for reference but shows that one day she finds a note on the table saying thanks for everything but I got a better offer you were disappointing

Hosea my boyfriends give me what I want they give me everything I need and he has given everything to her but she does not recognize anything that he has given and angry and hurting and betrayed Hosea is crushed and maybe his friends are telling him just get rid of her forget about it she's not worth it put it behind you because he's such full of shame imagine in the community everyone knows what he's like everyone knows his situation every time he looks at his two children he feels that same sense of betrayal and then in chapter three God comes to Hosea again and says go again go again love a woman love a woman love your wife again even though she's an adulteress go again

[17 : 31] Hosea didn't want to go so God has to say go again because you need to know my heart in this you're hurt so badly and and the thing is when she says go again she's with somebody else already but what Hosea does he goes and he says he buys her for 15 shekels and some barley and most scholars think that the reason why he bought her was because she'd either become so heavily indebted through her work that she could pay nothing off or her boyfriends had actually made her had become her pimp and they'd used her and exploited her so much until the point where she was past her sell-by date and so then they just threw her on the bargain section of the slave market which happened in the town and so there is

Goma stripped down naked in the middle of the town because all the buyers of the slaves wanted to see what they were getting down head bowed down covered with shame maybe closing her eyes to just salvage some dignity from this situation and all the men around in the town examine her wondering how much she's worth maybe shouting obscene comments at her because Goma is to be sold as property she's there exposed naked fearful and she knows it's all her own fault and one guy starts the bidding it's an auction one guy starts the bidding he says I'll give you 10 shekels for her another says I'll give you 11 another says give you 12 and then finally someone says 15 and Hosea says no I'll give you 15 and a load of barley and everyone says okay she's not worth any more than that go on take her do what you want with her we know how she's treated you and Hosea goes to take Goma and if you were Goma maybe she's been trying to blot out the sound of people because it's such a harrowing experience and she looks up at who has actually bought her and as she looks up she sees the one that she has betrayed so badly coming towards her and terror grips her heart because you know in that culture if you were a slave your master could do anything with you they could even kill you that's what everyone else thought was going to happen that's why they thought

Hosea was buying her but actually as she comes thinking this is my last moments alive as Hosea takes her out of the market she's thinking he's going to lay into me and then she looks up into his eyes and what does he say to her he says not words of anger but he says I want you to be with me I want you to be my wife stop playing around I don't want you to go with any other men now come and be with me stay with me I want you to be my wife and I am going to be faithful to you I haven't given up on you she's stunned stunned that's what the Bible calls grace God's undeserved incredible love for us that's what God is like that's how beautiful he is that's the kind of husband the kind of lover that

God is and if you think just for a moment if you really know that somebody loves you that much in spite of all you've done how secure will you be how secure that you know even if you failed even if everyone else tells you that you have messed up that you have failed that you have screwed up your life but he says to you I love you I want you to be mine come and be with me how does that now change the way that you view yourself in marriage your husband or your wife can bring that power of healing and restoration that's what God wants to do in our lives that's just liberating is that you don't have to go around trying to prove your worth to anybody else because even if the rest of the world says you're useless he comes to you and says you're mine and

I ain't never letting you go isn't that amazing but I think if I'm honest if I'm really honest I actually know this I've preached on it before I can tell you all the places in the Bible which tell it but I forget this so quickly and in fact I can guarantee there is not one person in this room who doesn't forget this regularly when it comes to Monday morning we suddenly start feeling insecure again because we've forgotten something why do I try and prove myself again and again well imagine Hosea is in your community group or he's your next door neighbor imagine living he's living out this message you're seeing him working struggling wrestling with all of these things a sense of betrayal and what do you think you're living next door to him what do you think about him you think what an idiot don't you like who would marry a prostitute you've just you deserve everything you've got okay you

should have been more like me who married more sensibly

[23 : 44] I married up okay we all do if you're men okay but the thing is we miss what Hosea is what Hosea is speaking through his life and to all the people around him who couldn't see it but what he's saying to them is this this isn't just about the way Gomer is treating me this is about how you are treating God because you are just like Gomer I don't want to admit that but the way God is saying the way that you treat me the way that you think you can just come once a week on a Sunday and just have your little bit of religion and then go away for the rest of the week doing whatever you want that hurts and breaks my heart the way that we you come to me and you only pray to me when you want to get something from me or life suddenly gone bad that's the only time you ever come to me you forget about me the rest of the time that breaks my heart because

I want you in relationship with me in this marriage with me and the way that I am calling Hosea to love Goma is the way that I love you and I'm calling you back to myself you see God if you know the story God has continually lavished his blessings on the people of Israel he's continually every promise he's made he's kept he's brought them into the land he's made them a people he's blessed them again and again and again and what do the people of Israel do in spite of all the wealth and the prosperity what they were doing they were running after other gods and they were saying they're the ones who've made us rich and if you were to look in verse one of chapter three it says God says to love Gomer as the Lord loves the Israelites though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes

I don't know if you notice anything strange there is raisin cakes in your top ten list of sins I don't know did you have a cheeky little cinnamon raisin bun this morning and think oh I'm disobeying God no I mean God is not anti desserts okay some of you are worried okay it's okay but what is God saying why does he talk about raisin cakes I mean he could have picked anything why raisin cakes well the raisin cakes were the things that the Israelites would sacrifice and offer to all the other gods around them and they'd have this little feast together and they'd celebrate these other gods and eat the raisin cakes together and what God is saying in this is he's saying do you realize Israelites how extraordinarily stunning my love for you the cost of my love the betrayal and yet

I keep loving you and look what you do in return how do you love me do you love me faithfully in return no what do you love you just love little raisin cakes that's what you go after you are captivated by something so small and so trivial as a little raisin cake because they thought if I can get a blessed life you know I'll have maybe a bit of God but I'll also have the other ones just in case and they seem to be working out a bit better than God so we'll go with them okay and what he's saying is if you don't see that all these other gods that eventually if you keep following them and if you know the rest of the story Israel goes sent into exile because of this if you keep following all these other gods they're just going to pimp you out you're going to become a slave the thing that you think you need the most in your life that you think is going to be the greatest lover is actually going to enslave you and just pimp you out that's what he's saying and if you think today what are those things that we do the same because this is not just to the

Israelites it's to us as well what are our little raisin cakes that we go after I think it can be many things one thing other people's approval you know I remember and I can't remember the exact details but I remember a long time ago when indie music had just come out and I didn't really know what indie music was I mean I thought it was something to do with Indiana Jones or something like that but I had some I was with some friends well in fact they weren't really friends they were people I wanted to be my friends and they were talking about indie music and how amazing indie music was and this is this and I was like yeah yeah it's great no idea what it is but it's great and and then one of them in some way turned around to me and said something like yeah Chris so what's your favorite indie band and I'm like going a pale shade of white at this stage and

[29 : 34] I said something vague like well there are so many you know I just can't pick one but but inside I knew you know at that moment I was exposed I was shamed I was shown to be the fraud because even though if other people hadn't recognized that I was a phony I knew inside me that I was I knew that I felt shamed and guilty inside me because what did I chase I wanted people's approval that was my raisin cake and I was willing to do anything I was willing to laugh along with everybody and then at one moment I became exposed just like Goma you think you're getting everything you want and then you get exposed by your raisin cakes because you always will anything you chase after other than God will at some point or other leave you shamed and exposed and even if other people don't see it you know it yourself and we spend the rest of our lives doing

this little dance trying to hide from the shame that we know we have so think about it in your life what is your raisin cake what is that thing that wraps up your life what is that God which takes you away if you're truly honest what sets the course of your life what shapes your thinking what do you think about throughout the day what are your decisions based around how do you spend your money because those will show you are you really investing in your marriage relationship is that with God or have you got a little raisin cake anything else that you're chasing after your other lover will disappoint you we've said the relationship that God wants is like a marriage we've said it's like a terrible marriage but actually to restore this relationship requires an extreme cost because

Hosea doesn't just have the personal cost of the humiliation to himself with all his neighbors his relatives people around he doesn't just have the ridicule from people about why he's been so stupid he doesn't just have the emotional turmoil of seeing his wife betray him again and again he also has to go and buy her physically back from the slave market and in verse 3 you'll see there's a verse which is in chapter 3 which is a little difficult to translate actually it says you are to live with me for many days you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man and I will behave the same way towards you what it basically means is this God says to Hosea the relationship that you have is not actually just going to suddenly become all a bed of roses that there's going to be a period of time where you

I want you to come and live with me and we're going to work through all the baggage all the emotional turmoil all the things which have happened in your life up to this point we're going to work it through and no matter what no matter how hard this is as we're working I'm not going to give up on you because I'm here faithful because I'm going to bring healing into your life because that's what a marriage relationship is meant to do and I don't know if you've ever had those experiences as you're trying to work through baggage with somebody I don't know if you've had that where somebody rings you up a friend rings you up on a Sunday night and says hey I've just got to talk to you I've got some things I just really need to share and you're watching your favorite TV program you don't want to get off the sofa and at that moment it's either sofa get up and talk to my friend but because they're your friend you decide you're going to get up maybe you go down and you meet with them and as you do that you listen to them pour out their heart for three hours and at the end of three hours how is your friend feeling they feel great they say thank you so much just such a burden off my shoulders how are you feeling terrible you're like why did you have to go on for so long you're feeling tired you're exhausted and you missed your favorite program and you go home and she's feeling great but you're feeling terrible but that's love because love always has what you might call a substitutionary cost to it there's always something where you may take the pain of somebody so that somebody else may get joy where you may lose your comfort so somebody else may get comfort that's the way love works right and Hosea is feeling the heart ache and the pain of God and this enormous cost must have been overwhelming for him for him to forgive someone who has hurt you badly costs you it always costs to forgive it always costs to walk with somebody loving it is not a light thing but Goma knows the stunning grace

Hosea knows the pain Hosea is broken so that Goma might be healed and some of you may even be thinking about how does this relate to even issues like divorce and you know I know many people who come for marriage counseling they will say their first question is can I get a divorce and this passage really isn't actually talking about divorce because it's talking about God's saving redeeming love for us in the Bible it does give reasons some reasons for when you can get divorced but what this passage I think shows us about God's heart is aren't we glad that God's first question to us is not can I get a divorce from you that's not God's first question he is willing to go through the cost for us and right in this passage

God promises he says there's going to come David a king who we know is Jesus that there's going to come a time where people are going to go back and are going to seek him and this relationship is going to be restored and in Matthew chapter 9 which is in the New Testament of the Bible Jesus comes and some of the religious leaders ask him why are your followers not fasting and do you know what Jesus says to them he says this he says you know can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them can the wedding guests mourn fast while the bridegroom is with them what he's saying is this Jesus is saying I am that husband Hosea was just a picture I am that husband who has come to get my bride and the agony that Hosea felt was nothing compared to the agony that Christ went through for us he was broken that we may be healed he sweated blood he knew emotional turmoil physical turmoil he knew betrayal that we will never know because

he came because we're so often captivated by so many other things and he comes to us and says will you come back to me

[38 : 02] I want relationship with you I want to captivate your heart with me and to restore you in this marriage relationship that's what he wants for you that's what he wants some some of us I think maybe like Hosea you really know that pain and that brokenness that betrayal at the moment and God sometimes takes us through these things because as you go through it you will begin to get something of God's heart and you will begin to be able to show God's heart and God's love to other people through that pain some of you are like Goma in fact I would say probably most of us all of us some of us have such guilt and shame that we know is there we trying to hide it we trying to prove ourselves that it's not there but if you come and you have a moment to yourself to stop and think about what you've done in your life the things that you're ashamed of the things that you're afraid of it may be an affair you've had it may be just poor choices that you have made in your life and you're like

Goma who is fearful because you don't want to see God again because you are afraid that if you look up and see like Hosea Goma saw Hosea that if you see God you're afraid he's going to punish you expose some of those issues in your life he's going to strike you down and maybe you're just trying to prove yourself that I'm worth it I'm hiding my shame but God says this everyone else in the crowd everyone else around you like with Goma may say you're a failure may say you're ashamed may say all kinds of things but God comes to you God comes to us and he looks us right in the eyes and he says I want you to be mine come back to me or let's work through all of this together because I'm not going to give up on you that's how much

I love you some of you may not be a Christian some of you may be a Christian and the question is are you acting like Goma what is it that is directing and shaping the course of your life is it something that is as beautiful as secure as healing as this love that God has for each one of you each one of us who are just like Goma but loved beyond what we could imagine let's pray father father i don't really want to think of myself like Goma because that's maybe too honest and sometimes i don't see the things that i do which i know i'm chasing after other things i don't see those things as really breaking your heart i think they're just rules that i'm maybe can be twisted can be bent loopholes can be found but lord please show us just how much you love us please lord for those of us here lord who are really struggling with the pain of broken relationships i pray that they would just know that you know what it's like and that it will run to you in this moment and that you will bring healing i pray for those of us who are who are struggling with the guilt and the shame and we just don't want to be exposed because it's too painful i pray lord that you would open our eyes help us to look up to you and to see you not as we think you are but as you really are and with all of that emotional and guilt and baggage lord i pray that we would just lay that honestly and openly before you and know your grace of restoration i pray for those who don't know you here that they would see that you are actually so much more beautiful so much more beautiful than all the other things the careers we chase after the relationships the status the power the respect and approval from everybody else that we chase after and yet so many of them care so little about us the people that we are worried about their opinions yet you care so much about us please show us your beauty show us your glory let us be captivated by you again thank you that that's who you are you are a gracious gracious

God amen you for to we have together to