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August 5th: Hosea 3 & John 7:53—8:30

August 4, 2021



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Hosea takes Gomer back. The woman caught in adultery.

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Transcript

Hosea chapter 3 In Hosea chapter 1 While chapter 1 described the Lord's instruction to Hosea in the third person, in chapter 3 there is a shift to a first person account as Hosea himself takes up the narrative. Hosea is instructed to take Goma, a woman who was loved by another man and is an adulteress, back to himself. More particularly, he is charged to love her.

Here Goma is presented not merely as sexually shameful as a wife of whoredom, but as guilty of adultery with another man. She isn't only a dishonourable woman more generally, but a woman who has openly betrayed Hosea. The emphasis on the verb love in verse 1, which John Goldengay highlights, underlines the emotional stakes of the situation.

The adultery of the wife is made so much more painful, shameful, and cruel on account

of the fervent love that her husband has for her. This is not a woman rejecting an indifferent or abusive husband, but a wife turning her back on her husband who loves her most deeply. The cakes of raisins are associated with gifts and expressions of love, as in places like Song of Solomon chapter 2 verse 5. Presumably they were used as some part of adulterous celebrations.

In loving this unfaithful woman, Hosea is taking on a position analogous to the Lord's relationship with Israel. He is assuming a position that will help him to understand more fully the heart of God. Goma seems to have been reduced to bond service, as Hosea has to redeem her from a master by a price.

The relationship, however, is re-established through this redemption. In verse 3, Hosea expresses the faithfulness that was to characterise his relationship with his formerly wayward and shameful wife Goma from that point onwards. She must dwell as his, he would be faithful to her, and she must be faithful to him.

We ought to appreciate the shame that Hosea would be assuming in taking such a woman back to himself. The rationale for the first command in verse 1, loving a woman who was loved by another man, was the Lord's own love for his people of Israel. The rationale for Hosea's speech to Goma in verse 3 is given in the verses that follow, in verses 4 and 5. Just as Goma has been reduced to a sort of servitude, so the children of Israel must be reduced.

Losing the form of privilege and status that they had enjoyed, they would be without king or prince, sacrifice or pillar, ephod or household gods. The king and prince were marks of Israel's sovereignty and their standing among the surrounding nations. The removal of the sacrifice and the pillar refer to the loss of Israel's cultic life, whether associated with idolatrous practice or the worship of the Lord.

The ephod and the household gods were means of divining God's will. The ephod had the Urim and the Thummim, and the household gods would also be consulted by idolaters. They would lose their national status, they would lose their communion with God, and they would also lose direction and means of guidance.

However, just as the reducing of Goma to servitude was not the end of her story, so Israel would know restoration as they returned and sought the Lord their God and David their king. The nation that had rejected the house of David would return to David. They would also return to the Lord and once more know his goodness in the latter days.

A question to consider, in the ministry of Hosea, he represents the Lord in his taking of this unfaithful wife. When he speaks, he speaks as the one who is the prophet of the Lord, but also the one who is symbolizing the Lord. How might his symbolizing of the Lord's relationship with his people have changed the way that people heard the message and also changed the way that he received and delivered it himself? John chapter 7

verse 53 to chapter 8 verse 30.

They went each to his own house. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning he came again to the temple.

All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst, they said to him, Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women.

So what do you say? This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.

And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. And when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus stood up and said to her, Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you? She said, No one, Lord.

And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on sin no more. Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. So the Pharisees said to him, You are bearing witness about yourself. Your testimony is not true.

Jesus answered, Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh.

I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two people is true.

I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me. They said to him, therefore, Where is your father? Jesus answered, You know neither me nor my father. If you knew me, you would know my father also.

These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple. But no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come. So he said to them again, I am going away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin.

Where I am going, you cannot come. So the Jew said, Will he kill himself, since he says, Where I am going, you cannot come. He said to them, You are from below, I am from above.

You are of this world, I am not of this world. I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins. So they said to him, Who are you? Jesus said to them, Just what I have been telling you from the beginning.

I have much to say about you, and much to judge. But he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him. They did not understand that he had been speaking to them about the Father.

So Jesus said to them, When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him.

As he was saying these things, many believed in him. John chapter 7 verse 53 to chapter 8 verse 11 is not present in our earliest texts, and only becomes a standard part of the Gospel from around 900 AD. Consequently, it is bracketed out in most translations as inauthentic, and most commentators set their commentary upon it apart from the rest of their commentary on the text that surrounds it.

However, the story was treated as a genuine part of the Gospel by figures such as Ambrose and Augustine. Jerome, writing in round 415, observed that the account is found in many Greek and Latin editions of the Gospel. Augustine believed that the text had been removed from certain texts by men of weak faith who had feared that it might undermine the seventh commandment for some of its hearers.

Despite such claims and the attempts of some to identify Johannine themes within it, the evidence overwhelmingly weighs against this passage belonging to the original text of the Gospel of John. Nevertheless, the questions of whether this is an authentic part of the text of John's Gospel, or more broadly an authentic text of Johannine origin, albeit not part of his account, should be distinguished from the question of whether it represents an authentic account of Jesus' ministry. At the outset, we should recognise that there is nothing about the account that seems to ring false as a historical account of Jesus.

It is, however, a text that seems to have more in common with Lucan themes and style than with Johannine themes and style. Indeed, some texts placed it after Luke chapter 21 verse 38 in the final week of Jesus' ministry. While it doesn't seem to belong there textually, it would be a far more natural home for the text in certain respects.

It would be surrounded by other confrontations with the scribes and Pharisees, other attempts to trap Jesus in his words. While this is the only time in the Gospel of John where we find a reference to the scribes, more typically John just speaks of the Jews. Likewise, the attention to the movement between the Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives is far more characteristic of the account of Luke.

This is the only reference to the Mount of Olives in John. The passage itself is not a complete unit, as Ramsey Michaels notes. It opens with people departing for their own houses, implying that it came from the middle of a larger narrative.

This raises the exciting possibility that it is a fragment of an unknown Gospel account that has come down to us through its adoption into the text of John. As John himself writes at the end of his Gospel, there were numerous things that Jesus did that he did not record. In all likelihood there were hundreds of eyewitness oral accounts, and even textual witnesses to Jesus' ministry, that never came down to us.

In support of the possibility that it belongs to a different Gospel tradition, Raymond Brown notes Eusebius' reference to Papias' recounting the story of a woman accused of sins before Jesus, which Papias claimed belonged to the Gospel according to the Hebrews. Papias wrote around the turn of the second century, so if this were the account of the woman caught in adultery, his would be an extremely early witness. He also observes the clear reference to the account in the Syrian *Diduscalia Apostolorum*, typically dated to the third century, where it is spoken of as a widely known account, perhaps providing evidence that it had already circulated extensively in Syria, maybe even by the end of the second century AD.

This still leaves us with the question of how it came to occupy its present position in the Gospel of John. In the surrounding material, Jesus is teaching in the Temple in Jerusalem, so it does share a setting in common. Further, the themes of judgment in chapters 7 and 8 seem to fit the story of the woman caught in adultery thematically.

In John chapter 7 verses 50 to 51, the scene immediately preceding it, we read, Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, Does our Lord judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does? The question of admissible evidence is an important one in the wider context too, in chapter 8 verses 13 to 18 for instance. Later in chapter 8 verse 46, which one of you convicts me of sin? The question of the canonicity of this passage will depend upon the criteria of canonicity that we follow. Practically speaking, as it is part of most English Bibles, and also part of the Latin Vulgate, for many Christians the text either is regarded as canonical, or at least functions as quasi-canonical.

If this is an authentic gospel witness that has, by God's providence, come down to us, treating it as quasi-canonical may not be inappropriate. However, as with other such passages, we should beware of resting any doctrine too heavily upon this passage by itself. We should bracket it from the material that surrounds it too, and also be alert to the ways in which, if such bracketing is not handled carefully, it interrupts the flow of John's own account.

Looking at the passage itself, the scribes and the Pharisees, as elsewhere, but especially as in the Passion Week, seem to be trying to trap Jesus in his words, either getting him to

claim an authority that would go against the rule of the Romans, who may recently have stripped the Sanhedrin of the right to impose capital punishment, or to compromise the law of Moses, which allowed for such a sentence. If the Romans had recently removed the right of imposing capital punishment from the Sanhedrin, then the intention of the scribes and Pharisees here would be much more understandable, and would be similar to that of the question of paying taxes to Caesar. They wanted to trap Jesus by getting him to declare himself on a volatile political issue of the day.

Many Christians have understood this story as representing Jesus' challenge to the death penalty more generally. There is also a very popular conception that it is an illustration of the way that we should refrain from judging other people's sins. However, both of these approaches to the passage are far off target in their interpretations.

Jesus' challenge to the scribes and the Pharisees here is not that the death penalty is wrong per se, as many people have read the passage, such a challenge would hardly have been persuasive to them, and would likely have served their purposes in entrapping him, but that the death penalty could only be unjustly exercised under the circumstances, nor is it denying the appropriateness of judgment. To argue that would be to prove far too much, denying the legitimacy of judicial actions more generally. Within the Old Testament, the person who cast a stone was making a self-maledictory judgment, declaring that if they were guilty of false or unjust witness, the same judgment would come back upon them.

The command of the law was that the witnesses should be the first to cast stones in such an execution. In Deuteronomy chapter 17 verse 7, the hand of the witnesses shall be the first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people, so you shall purge the evil from your midst. Also Deuteronomy chapter 19 verses 16 to 19, if a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the Lord, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days.

The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother, so you shall purge the evil from your midst. Jesus challenged the accusers of the woman, needs to be understood against such a background. By foregrounding the act of casting the first stone, Jesus was stripping the accusers of the shelter of the crowd, and calling the supposed witnesses to be prepared to take a personal responsibility for their actions, and culpability if they were giving some sort of unjust testimony.

The first stone, as René Girard argues, provides the model for every subsequent stone. The first stone is the hardest to cast, and each successive stone becomes progressively easier, as the one who casts it imitates those casting stones before him. The situation had all of the signs of entrapment.

The woman was supposedly caught in the very act, red-handed, yet no man was taken. Whatever the guilt or innocence of the woman, none of her accusers had any standing upon which to judge in her case. Oliver O'Donovan writes, In the story of Jesus and the woman taken in adultery, which has shaped so much of Christian jurisprudence, Jesus does not challenge the generic categories in which the judges describe the act, nor does he challenge the application of those categories to the accused woman, but he demands that another dimension of description should be included, the ambiguous relation in which those who accuse others of adultery stand to the adulterers, and so he challenges the discrimination they have made.

Were that community to carry out the death penalty on that woman, the line between innocence and guilt would have been drawn wrongly. The compromised character of the witnesses may be on account of their involvement in the entrapment. Alternatively, but less likely, it might be a result of their own guilt in similar matters.

In Luke chapter 16 verses 14 to 18, Jesus challenges the Pharisees for their sexual license and love of money. Perhaps that is part of the background in view here. The accusers gradually depart, the oldest first, leaving only Jesus and the woman remaining.

Where there were no witnesses in the case of adultery, a different judgment applied, the test of jealousy, given in Numbers chapter 5. The test of jealousy puts the judgment in such cases in the hands of God himself. Perhaps we should see Jesus' actions here as a symbolic performance of the test of jealousy. In particular, it might help to explain Jesus' strange act of writing upon the ground.

The test of jealousy involved dust from the tabernacle floor and a handwritten set of curses. Both of these were placed into water that the woman had to drink. Jesus is writing for quite some time, enough time for the accusers to have to persist in asking their question on several occasions and for them all to depart after his challenge in response.

The writing is probably not incidental to the narrative here and seeing this as a sort of symbolic inaction of the test of jealousy might help to explain what is happening. The effect of the test of jealousy was to reveal secrets through the deliverance of divine judgment. At the climax of the ritual of jealousy, God would judge in the case of a woman who was accused of adultery.

Here, however, it is Jesus who declares the woman's release from the sentence. Perhaps we are to see a subtle allusion to Jesus' divine identity here as he exercises the prerogative of God in judgment. Jesus brings hidden sins to light and knows the hearts of people as we have seen on several occasions already in the gospel.

However, he has not come to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. Here he is not merely playing the role of the priest in the ritual but the role of

God himself. His judgment concerning the woman is an unjudgment, is characterized by grace.

He does not deny the fact that she has sinned but he calls her not to sin anymore and releases her. This episode, we must be clear, is an interruption in the original text of John which should run directly from chapter 7 verse 52 to chapter 8 verse 12. One of the main effects of removing the intervening text is that the conversation seems to occur on the same occasion as the previous one.

Verses 12 and following continue many of the themes of the preceding chapter. Questions of Jesus' origin and destination, of admissible testimony, of the standards of judgment, of the people seeking him and not finding him, and of Jesus' relationship with the Father. The discussion of Jesus' witness here is also closely paralleled with statements in chapter 5 verses 31 to 39.

If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true. There is another who bears witness about me, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth, not that the testimony that I receive is from man, but I say these things so that you may be saved.

He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John, for the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, the very works that I am doing, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me, and the Father who sent me has himself borne witness about me, his voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and it is they that bear witness about me.

Jesus' claim that he is the light of the world anticipates a theme that will be taken up in the chapter that follows. It also recalls statements of chapters 1 and 3 about Jesus as the light coming into the world, revealing the character of people's deeds in the process. The Pharisees challenge Jesus, claiming that he is bearing witness about himself, witness that would be legally inadmissible.

Jesus' response is initially puzzling, seeming to be in conflict with statements that he makes elsewhere. Does he judge, or doesn't he? Does he bear witness about himself, or does he not? His point here is the same as in chapter 5 verses 31 and following. Jesus' testimony is not just his own word, but the word of the Father.

Likewise, Jesus' judgments are not his own private judgments, but rather the judgments of the Father. He does not testify alone, but the Father testifies through him and about him. The Father's word stands behind all of his words and backs them up.

However, Jesus' opponents neither know him nor the Father who sent him. The opponents speculate that Jesus' statement that he is going away and they won't find him when they seek him and will die in their sins might be a reference to Jesus' intention to commit suicide. Of course, it will be through Jesus' death and his going to the cross that he will forge this way that they cannot come on.

However, Jesus' identity continues to be presented in an extremely cryptic manner at this point. The fuller revelation of his identity will come when they have lifted up the Son of Man, referring to the event of the cross. That would precipitate the manifestation of who Christ really is.

As he is lifted up on the cross in the resurrection and to the Father's right hand in the ascension, his true identity and authority would finally be manifested. A question to consider. Reflecting upon the ways in which Jesus identifies himself with the Father in this and other parts of John, how can we see an early Christology and Trinitarian theology starting to take shape?