Take-Home 3. The Covenant God Keeps

From the Beginning

What We Found

God told a prophet to marry a woman who would betray him, and then to go back and buy her back, so that a nation could see what its own covenant looked like from God's side.

A contract exchanges goods, is enforced by penalty, and ends when it is broken. A covenant exchanges persons, is sworn by oath with God as witness, and when it is broken it is mourned and restored at the cost of the one who kept it.

After all the accusation in Hosea 2, God says he will speak tenderly to her, and she will call him my husband rather than my master. Many readers hear in that an answer to the domination named in Genesis 3:16, though the Hebrew words differ and the connection is a reading rather than a direct reversal.

In the betrothal of Hosea 2:19-20, God is the only one doing anything. Every quality named comes from his side.

The nuptial image is not occasional. God is called husband or bridegroom in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, and Christ takes the title for himself in the Gospels.

Ezekiel 16 is genuinely disturbing, and it ends in an everlasting covenant and forgiveness rather than in punishment. No passage of Scripture permits a husband to shame, coerce, or use force against his wife.

Malachi calls the LORD the witness between a man and the wife of his youth. A witnessed oath is not a private arrangement that two people can quietly renegotiate.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX ON WHY THE SONG IS IN THE BIBLE

Across dozens of sermons on the Song of Songs, St. Bernard taught that the soul's union with God is genuinely spousal, and he read the Song's language of desire, allegorically and at length, as the vocabulary Scripture itself gives us for what God wants with us.

The nuptial language of Scripture belongs to every Christian, married or not, because marriage is the sign and not the substance.

Summary of his teaching in the Sermons on the Song of Songs.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: POPE BENEDICT XVI ON THE LOVE GOD HAS FOR US

In his first encyclical, Pope Benedict XVI argued that the prophets, and Hosea and Ezekiel above all, describe God's love for Israel in frankly passionate terms, and that this love is at once a searching desire and a wholly gratuitous gift.

We do not learn what God is like by studying good marriages. We learn what marriage is by studying God.

Deus Caritas Est, sections 9 to 11.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. TERESA OF AVILA ON THE MARRIAGE THE SOUL IS OFFERED

St. Teresa of Avila described the deepest union available to a soul in this life using the language of spiritual

marriage, and she was careful to say that it is God who initiates, God who sustains, and God who gives what no amount of effort can produce.

Read that against Hosea. The betrothal formula in Hosea 2:19-20 has one subject throughout, and it is not Israel. I will betroth you, three times, and the woman does nothing at all.

Summary of her teaching in the seventh dwelling places of The Interior Castle.

Live It This Week

- **Read Hosea 2:19-20 out loud to each other once this week.** Not as a sentiment. As a description of the kind of promise you are about to make and the kind of promise God has already made to you.
- **Find the exit.** Each of you name one assumption you have quietly been carrying about what would justify leaving. Say it out loud to each other. You do not have to resolve it tonight.
- **Pray one decade together for a marriage you know that is in trouble.** Do not tell them you are doing it.
- **Read Matthew 19:1-12 again before next session,** slowly, and note every question anyone asks in the passage.

BEFORE THE ALTAR

This week. Ask the parish who witnesses your consent and what the parish requires of your witnesses. Then ask what the timeline is for choosing your readings, and whether Hosea 2:19-20 may be among them.

Also. Each of you name one assumption you have carried about what would justify leaving a marriage. Say it out loud to each other before Session 4.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

And I will betroth you to me for ever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy.

Hosea 2:19

Before next session: Read Matthew 19:1-12 before Session 4, slowly. Note every question anyone asks in the passage.

Catechism: CCC 219, 1611-1612, 1617, 1639.