

Irresistible Grace

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Preacher: Joe Hall

[0 : 00] Well, for those of you who saw it, the Queen's funeral was pretty special, wasn't it, for lots of reasons. It was incredibly full of the gospel.

What an amazing thing that in the year 2022, there could not have been one person in our nation who was not offered the hope that is in Christ in the face of death and in grief.

But of all the really powerful and really striking moments in that funeral, one of the most powerful, I thought, came towards the end.

Perhaps you remember after 40 minutes or so of grieving, there was a fanfare on the trumpets and then silence.

And the silence went on and on and then another blast on the trumpets. And then what happened? You remember the organ started up.

[1 : 02] Everyone stood and sang, God save the King. There's a massive turning point in the whole tone of the service from looking back in grief to looking forward in hope.

And that is the kind of dramatic turning point that we have come to in the book of Hosea in these verses. Last week, we heard Hosea say hard things, didn't we?

He said, God said of Israel, I will punish her. She went after her lovers and me she forgot. But we felt the strong grip of God's jealous love for his people, love that will not let us go, even when we want nothing more than to run into the arms of other gods and kings and idols.

We felt the weightiness of those therefore. In verse 6, therefore I will block her path with thorn bushes. Therefore, verse 9, I will take away my corn, my new wine when it is ready.

We felt, didn't we, the toughness of God's love. But we recognized that if God's love were any weaker, then we would have no hope of being loved by him.

[2 : 23] And if there were any barriers or boundaries that God was not willing to break through in his great love for us, well, we would blindly break through then and be free of his love forever and lost to him.

But the lengths that God is prepared to go to get us back so that we would know him, well, it means that we can never go too far not to be reached, not to be found and loved by him.

His love knows no limits. And looking back at what it has cost God to love us like that, and the great lengths that he has gone to to love us, well, there must surely be a part of us that grieves.

But at the start of our passage this morning, the darkness lifts, the trumpets blast again with the third therefore of verse 14. And it is so different, isn't it, from the thunder and the darkness of what has come before.

Therefore, therefore, I am going to allure her. Such tenderness and such warmth. Where does this come from?

[3 : 33] Well, it comes from the same burning heart of God, his passion for his people. So today we turn to the future of God's marriage, and we find that it is thanks only to God that it is much, much brighter than our past.

And it is all tied up, look, at the end of chapter 3, that last verse of chapter 3, what is it tied up with? See, the future of God's marriage is tied up with the future of God's monarchy.

They will come to the Lord their God and David their king. So then, what does God have planned for his people?

Well, let's lean into the glory of this great turning point together, and we'll begin firstly with an irresistible proposal. An irresistible proposal.

When a couple gets engaged, what do we all ask? How did it happen? God, tell us the story. We all want to know, don't we?

[4 : 40] I guess proposals can range from the extravagant to the inexcusable, really. I knew a man once who proposed to his girlfriend with a ring out of a bag of Haribo.

And amazingly, she said yes. My proposal was somewhere in between, I think, those two extremes. I took Susie for a ring-themed lunch at a fancy bagel bakery, and then we took a stroll in the sunshine to one of our favorite spots by the water at New Haven Harbor, which is in Edinburgh, looking across the water to Fife.

And there I pop the question, and the rest is history, as they say. Well, what verses 14 to 20 are describing for us is a bit like God's proposal.

It's not the first time. It is a new proposal for a new wedding day, a new covenant to renew their wedding vows. And he will do that, bring that renewal about by an irresistible proposal.

So, what do we say? Tell us the story. How does this happen? Well, how does it begin? Verse 14, I am going to allure her.

[6 : 01] How does God want to get his bride back? Well, it's not by force, or blackmail, or trickery, or bribery, or an illegal technicality.

No, he wants her to fall in love with him all over again. He says he will speak tenderly to her.

Literally, he will speak to her heart.

And where is he going to propose? Well, he says, I will lead her into the wilderness. Okay, not perhaps where we would choose to pop the question.

It doesn't seem like a very romantic place to take your bride to be, does it? But the wilderness is a very special place in this love story. We touched on this a wee bit last time.

It is where God found his people. They were hungry. They were thirsty. They didn't want to be there. But it is where the Lord first brought them, when he took them out of the darkness of slavery and brought them to himself into the wilderness.

[7 : 08] And so, the wilderness has a kind of complicated history for Israel. It was a place of grumbling and a place of blessing. It was a bit, if you like, like the honeymoon in the relationship.

It's where Israel got to know her new husband and experience the fullness of his love for her. And last time we heard God's threatening ultimatum, didn't we?

That if his bride of Israel did not give up her unfaithfulness, he would take her back there and leave her where he found her. But now he's saying what?

That he would take her back there not to leave her, as he had every right to do, and abandon her and forsake her, but rather to start their courtship again from the beginning.

Remember the first time we came here together, he says. Remember what I told you. Out of all the nations, you will be my treasured possession.

[8 : 16] Although all the earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Out of all the world, I have chosen you, he said. I've set my everlasting love on you, my treasure, my love, my bride.

That is what God told Israel in the wilderness. And what did she say back? Well, Hosea leaves us in suspense.

But those are the words that God wants to hear again from his runaway bride. The words she first told him that day in the wilderness so long ago. There she will respond as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.

And before we get into the meaning of this, its implications for us, let's just pause and recognize that this is a scene that is breathtaking.

It's a scene that sweeps us off our feet, isn't it? Perhaps some of you like putting on a romance or a rom-com on a Saturday night.

[9 : 27] I know at least one person here who does. We watched a fair few on our own honeymoon. But this romance just blows the romances that our world invents out of the water, doesn't it?

It's a breathtaking love. Incredible act of love. After all Israel had done to him. Throwing his love back in his face.

Spitting his words back at him. That God would bring her right back to the beginning. Right back to the place where they first said, I love ye.

To win her heart again. So that she would fall in love with him afresh. Not to punish her. But to speak gently to her.

Not by brainwashing her. Or beating it out of her. But by what, see in verse 19, what is he planning? Well, this is a proposal, isn't it?

[10:29] I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you in righteousness and justice. In love and compassion. I will betroth you in faithfulness. And you will know the Lord.

What is he planning? Well, he's planning to ask his people, will you marry me again? Again. What a question for a wronged husband to ask his unfaithful bride.

Would God really get down on one knee for these people? Ask them on his knees. Propose to them a second time to be his bride.

Can we get our heads around that? Is this seriously what he is planning? Well, God leaves us in no doubt. Does he betroth? Well, speaking about this like it's a proposal.

Betrothal was really more than a proposal. To get out of being betrothed, you actually have to get divorced. That is the level of commitment that this relationship involves.

[11:34] And not only that, but how many times does God say he will betroth himself to them? If you just count, count one to three times.

And we know how this works in Hebrew, don't we? They didn't have bold or italics or highlighters. So when they wanted to really stress a word, they would repeat it.

When they really, really wanted to stress a word, they would repeat it again. And the classic example is from Isaiah chapter 6. Remember, what do the angels cry out to each other about God? Holy, holy, holy. And as they're saying, holy, more holy, most holy. And so what is God saying that he would do here?

What is his commitment? He wants to be betrothed, more betrothed, most betrothed to them. A lasting commitment times three.

[12:42] Friends, God is completely serious about this plan and carrying it through to the end. Because the new marriage that it creates will not be like the old marriage that went so wrong.

See those words he uses to describe the new relationship. Righteousness, justice, love, compassion, faithfulness. This would be a renewal of the marriage, not in name only, but down to the very heart.

And this time the change would be permanent. He would betroth himself to them forever. And so, friends, this is God's plan to get his bride back.

By pursuing her with an unending love. By chasing her with this proposal, an irresistible proposal to take her back to himself.

He wants a new wedding day. And a new marriage. Which is an unfamiliar way of telling us, I think, what we probably already know.

[13:52] Which is that he is planning a new covenant. A new covenant. Sometimes we become so familiar, don't we, with the language of the Bible.

But it takes a fresh picture to puncture our hearts again. To freshen our hearts with the vision of God's great love. To break us out of our familiarity.

Can we get our hearts around this this morning? That the way that God promises here to whisper his love to the heart of his lost bride.

Is how he has come close to speak to our hearts in Christ. We are in a new covenant. We are in a new marriage with the Lord Jesus Christ.

If our trust is in him. And how did that happen? How did God bring us to himself? How did you become a Christian? If I can put it as simply as that. Perhaps some of you have read the book by John Stott.

[14:57] On that very question. He's one of the best known Christians of the last hundred years. And he wrote this book, *Why I Am a Christian*. And if you've not read it. You might think that that book was about arguments or reasons why he decided to become a Christian.

Why he decided Christ was trustworthy and good and true. But it's not. *Why I became a Christian*, says John Stott, is this. It is because God pursued me relentlessly.

Because God pursued me relentlessly. Because the Father set his love upon me from before the beginning of the world. Because the Son came to seek and to save me when I was lost from him.

Because the Spirit took away my heart of stone that was dead. And gave me a heart of flesh that is living. He didn't become a Christian, he says. By chasing a God who hid from him and didn't want to be found.

He became a Christian because God found him. And pursued him with a relentless love. So that when he finally saw Christ himself with the eyes of faith.

[16:12] He simply couldn't say no. He couldn't do otherwise. And friends, that is the only reason why any of us is a Christian. Isn't this our story that Christ came near.

And spoke his irresistible proposal to our hearts. That he brought us outside the city. And into the wilderness to the cross.

And said, do you remember what I said? The first time we came here. Here is the new covenant in my blood. Poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Here it is. Can we piece these things together? In our hearts this morning. That as Christ hung on the cross.

God was getting down on one knee. For you and me. You started singing recently these incredible words. Haven't we? From heaven he came and sought her.

[17:13] To be his holy bride. With his own blood he brought her. And for her life he died. There it is. The irresistible proposal.

That is his proposal to us this morning. If we are not yet in him. Sometimes we struggle a bit with that word. Irresistible. Don't we? What does that mean?

Sometimes Christians have misunderstood. The irresistibility of God's grace. Is a kind of cold and hard truth of the Bible. As if God intends to kind of come and catch us.

And force us. And disregard our will. But here in Hosea. Do you see? Can we see here this morning? That his grace is irresistible.

Because when we truly get our hearts around it. We cannot choose anything else. His grace is irresistible. Because when we experience his grace.

[18:11] We cannot help being his. Our resistance melts in the face of his love. Our will to resist dissipates. Our hearts can't help but be drawn to him.

As irresistibly as a magnet. He wins us over. By his word. Speaking grace to our hearts.

Not by forcing us. Or tricking us. But by his great love. And compassion. And grace. And friends. Let me assure you. That is never going to change.

There will never come a time. In life. When God will pursue you. With anything but. His love. Grace. And compassion. If you love his son.

The Lord Jesus Christ. Because his love. Never fails. And Hosea's biggest hope for us. As a church. As we study his book.

[19:07] Together. Is that we would have an ever growing. Deepening vision. In full color. Of the burning heart of God.

And his love. That we would know. We would know. The height. And depth. And breadth. And width. And length. Of the love of Christ. For us. And so.

The question is. Is this how we see him? Is this how we come to him? If we were to take a kind of spiritual x-ray.

Of the heart of God. Is that what we would think. That we would find. In it. Do we come to him? As the one who has loved us. And gave himself for us.

An infinitely loving husband. Who would scrape his knees on the ground. And have his body nailed to a cross. To have us back with him. Or do we come to him?

[20:02] As a strong-willed master. Always demanding more. Never satisfied. How do we respond to Christ? Christ. He tells us how he wants us to respond.

In verse 16. Doesn't he? In that day. Declares the Lord. You will call me. My husband. And not my master. Not my master.

It is a terrible thing. Friends. For us to know Christ. Christ only as Lord and master. And not as redeemer. And friend. And lover.

And husband. Because at the end of the day. Which one are we going to come to? Who are we going to trust? Who are we going to love? If Christ is only our Lord and master.

Will we ever truly come to him? Will we ever trust him with our sins? We will know our failings. We will fear his anger. But when we know him not only as Lord.

[21:02] But as husband. As redeemer. Friend. Savior. Well then we won't be able to help coming to him with our sins.

Knowing our failures. We won't fear his wrath. But we will ask his ready forgiveness. Knowing he is gracious. He is slow to anger.

He is overflowing with steadfast love and faithfulness. Friends. We will tremble before him. Not in fear. But in awe.

And wonder. So do you know Christ today as your redeemer? Is he your redeemer today? You Hosea would have us hear God speaking tenderly to his bride. And know to the very core of our being. That that is how Christ speaks to each of us today. To know in our very heart that he loved us.

[22 : 01] And gave himself in love. That we might live. He would have us drink in the love of Christ. That compelled him irresistibly to the cross. So that by his spirit we might be drawn irresistibly to him.

If you do not know Christ personally today. If that is not you. If you do not know in your heart the love of Christ for you. That brought him to the cross.

Well do not dismiss him. Do you not think that his proposal is weak or cheap? Don't resist him. Let him draw you to himself. Let him draw your heart. Let him speak gently to you. His love. When you truly know it is irresistible. He is irresistible.

Just let that sink in. What makes someone a Christian. Is knowing in our hearts. And being able to say. Not only that Christ loved us. And gave himself for us.

[23 : 03] But that Christ loved me. And gave himself for me. Love me. Receive his love. Believe in him. There is one more way.

If you like we see his love. Before we leave this longer point. This morning. And it is all this talk of beasts and birds. Did you notice that? And bows and swords.

And battle. What is all that about? Well one of the most exciting things about getting married. Is setting up a new home together. The proposal has happened.

The wedding day has come and gone. The couple starts dreaming of where they will live together. What will their home be like? And God is thinking exactly the same thing.

In fact we know don't we? Jesus spoke about this. Before he died. He went to the cross and said. My father's house has many rooms. If it were not so.

[24 : 00] Would I have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you. A place. If I go and prepare a place for you. I will come back. And take you to be with me. That you also may be where I am.

A new wedding. A new covenant. A new home. That is what Hosea is looking forward to here.

Covenant with the beasts and the birds. Sounds a little bit like God's promise to Noah.

Doesn't it? In a new created world. There would still be bloodshed to come. But not in this world. Not in this new world. Bow and sword and battle.

I will abolish from the land. He says. People will lie down in safety. And instead. There will be an overflow of good things. From heaven to earth. An overflow of grain and wine.

And oil from heaven. It's a picture of a perfect world. Land of safety. And security. And peace. As we pray together.

[24 : 58] As Donald led us in prayer. Is that not what we longed for? A place. A world without war. Without chaos. Without battle. And full of goods. And God is saying.

This would be the home. Of his redeemed people. When he came. Again. We are speaking. Aren't we? About something. That is familiar. To many of us. And yet unfamiliar.

What are we speaking about? A new creation. A new creation. That is the place. That Christ is preparing. For those. Who love him. That is our new home.

It's not ready yet. But boy. It's coming. Because he has proposed to us in love. And wed us to himself. United us to Christ. And we are going to live there with him.

Behold. The dwelling place of God is with man. Behold. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. And for all his love. What do we say to him today?

[25 : 57] Well. What were the words that. His people first said. When they were in the wilderness. That first day. They were together. What's there in verse 23.

But he says. I will show my love. To the one I called. Not my loved one. I will say. To those called. Not my people. You are my people. And they will say. You are my God.

It's an irresistible proposal. So what will we say today? Well let us say this to him friends. Turn to Christ. And say. These ancient words.

You are my God. My Lord. And my God. Better still. I am your loved one. I am yours. And you are mine.

That is the irresistible proposal. Of chapter two. And that is really. What Hosea wants us to take away. Home with us today. Of course there's still chapter three.

[26 : 58] But you'll be glad to know. Chapter three is just there to illustrate. What we have already heard. Remember back in chapter one. We found ourselves sitting in Hosea's home.

Looking at those family photos. Seeing the mess. The sadness of God's family. And then Hosea came in. And began to tell us the story. Of God's marriage.

God's family. That's been chapter two. Well chapter three brings us back into the room. With Hosea. Hosea is back in the picture.

And it's as if he wants to bring us full circle. He wants us to sit and see. And dwell in this reality. That he has been preaching to us. In his life and home.

Because now. Notice that Hosea's wife. Gomer. Comes back into the room. And sits down next to her husband. And takes his hand.

[27 : 55] And as our mouths hang open. In shock. At this reality. Hosea tells us how the renewal. Of their union. Happens. So we finish. With a short.

A brief final scene. That tells us about a costly purchase. Here is a picture. Of what I am telling you. Says the Lord. If you just glance down.

At chapter three with me. The Lord said to me. That is Hosea. Go show your 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. And love the sacred raisin cakes. So I bought her. For fifteen shekels of silver.

And about a homer. And lethic of barley. I told her. 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.

[28 : 50] Towards you. This is what Hosea had to go and do. For his wife. It is not clear what Goma was up to. Was she enslaved as a prostitute?

Was she perhaps a cult prostitute. In one of the pagan shrines? We are not sure. But whatever it was. Hosea had to go and buy back his own wife.

He was to show her love again. And it is not at all clear. Is it that Goma was even grateful. Or willing to come home. Hosea has to do it.

Even though she is loved by another man. And so Hosea gets out his bank card. And a good bit of barley. And he pays to have his wife back.

Who doesn't want to come. Can you feel the shame. And the humiliation. Of needing to do that. It is so shameful. That some commentators simply can't believe.

[29 : 47] That it happens. You know how could a prophet do something. So pathetic. So shameful. And still represent the living God. But isn't that just the point.

It is God who draws the dots. Between himself. And his prophet Hosea. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites. Though they turn to other gods.

Israel has left me for a handful of reasons. Says the Lord of the cosmos. That was her love for me. Her heart has not changed. But I would pay anything.

To have her back. And so friends. If we don't think Hosea could stand in for God. Well we haven't really seen. Have we the scandal. Of his love.

The gospel of his grace. We haven't really seen his burning. Beating heart for us. Because Hosea's costly purchase. Is a little picture of God.

[30 : 46] Who gave his one and only son. He poured out his priceless blood. For people who didn't want to be his. Paul reminds us in Romans 5.

That God has shown his love for us in this. That while we were still sinners. As God sent his son to die for us. Do you see the depths of shame.

That his love took him to. The humiliation of the cross. That when we were in bed with other gods. And when we were living in sin and in darkness. He came and died on the cross.

To buy us back for good. So that for many days. Days without end. We would live faithfully to him. That we would put away. Our idols.

Our gods. Our kings. Our lovers. The things that we trust in. That are not worth our trust. And be his alone. So that our hearts would be filled with love for him again.

[31 : 44] See this is what he is looking forward to. Isn't it? When his people would return. And seek the Lord and David their king. Of course David is long gone by now. But one was coming from the lion and family of David.

Who would show this great love for his people. The Lord Jesus Christ. The one who would pay the debt. Who would suffer the cost. To bring us back to him.

And so friends. What can we say to these things? How does he want us to respond today? What he calls us to come trembling. Trembling to the Lord.

And to his blessings. We do not fear his anger. Do we? But that does not mean we cannot tremble before his love. Stand in awe of his presence.

His grace. He calls us to gaze in awe. At the person of Christ. To see his irresistible grace. To see the lengths that he went to.

[32 : 46] The shameful. The painful death of the cross. To see his unfailing love for us. And for us to say to him. Trembling. In adoration.

And worship. My Lord. And my God. Let us say that to him together. As we pray. Let's pray. Lord Jesus Christ.

We come to you. Lord. And in many ways. Are lost for words. As we consider what ye did. To buy us back. Lord.

How we thank you for the cross. How we thank you for your suffering. We thank you for your blood. Poured out. For our forgiveness. We thank you for your death.

You died to take away our death. The penalty for our sin. Lord Jesus. We thank you all the more. That you did this for us. When we were far from you.

[33 : 55] When we still lived in darkness. When we still loved our sin. When we still did not want to be yours. How we thank you for such love.

That has brought us to yourself. And how we pray by your spirit now. That you would fill our hearts. With love for you. That you would help us. As we go into this new week.

To gaze in awe at you. And each day. We pray. To be drawn to you again. We pray. Lord Jesus. That by your spirit. And by your word. That you would speak gently.

To our hearts each day. That you would not let us lose sight. Of your great love. Lord. We pray. That you would help us. Not to come to you. Only as our Lord and master.

But as our friend and savior. Lord. Draw our hearts to yourself. We pray. Help us to treasure you. As you treasure us. And keep us forever faithful to you.

[34 : 53] For this we pray. And ask in your great name. Amen. Amen.