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“Sex. Part 3”

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Last week we said that God put this groove, this rhythm, this beat behind everything in the universe. And we have the opportunity to play within that rhythm or to play outside of that rhythm. When we play inside the rhythm things sound right and they work right. And we saw that God has a rhythm for sex and that involves three Hebrew words: raw-aw, ahabah, and dode. Raw-aw means companionship, but more than just buddies, it means I know you and you know me—not just your pretty stuff, but I know your junk. We’ve seen the wicked parts of one another and still we’ve decided to work on this relationship. Raw-aw never occurs on the first or second date. It happens at the point when you look at something your spouse or the person you’re dating does, something that makes you say, “Oh, No!” Raw-aw occurs in that moment when you decide to keep going. Raw-aw leads into ahabah. Ahabah is a love of the will, it says, “I am not going anywhere.” It has no romantic connotations; it has a very aggressive tone. It’s the idea that even when your girlfriend, boyfriend, or spouse wants to kill you, you are not going anywhere. It’s when you decide that this is the person you want to fight with for the rest of your life. All this work and still no sex. Now we get to dode. Dode is not the Hebrew word for sex. It is the word for sex when raw-aw and ahabah are present because at that point sex is not just two bodies together; it’s two persons. It is in that moment that all the love and intimacy we crave is found. And that is why we are so oversexed and still so lonely because we’ve divorced sex from raw-aw and ahabah. We made sex the end-all to everything and sex requires very little work. Without the foundation, you’re left with technique; we become lonely, miserable, oversexed people. So we talked about playing within God’s rhythm.

This week I was planning on talking about modesty and how we spend so much time on our outside and so little time on our inside. From makeup to working out and to tanning beds and our hair, we spend all this time on our outward appearance. We do very little looking at the soul. And the time we do spend on our soul is spent rationalizing that the reason that everything is wrong with us is everyone else’s fault. I was thinking about how our church is this “mutt”; we all have so many different backgrounds. We are this weird, eclectic, goofy place. Over 50% of us are in the first two years of their Christianity. So what happens is that when people look at us, they sometimes comment on what we wear. We’ve had girls who are strippers come to our church. And how do we expect strippers to dress, but like strippers. We can’t expect people who don’t know their worth comes from Jesus to dress like they do know it does. So I wanted to talk about how we always want to be safe here. We have to be mature enough to look at the ceiling and pray. I wanted to talk about how much worth we get from our appearance and what’s behind our dressing to solicit attention. And the pain that comes from it. But I’m not going to do that talk tonight because over the last two weeks we’ve just been flooded with messages and stories. Any time we talk about God’s ideal, there’s a lot of pain involved. Why? Because we are all sinners and we all fall short of that ideal.

So we’ve been getting all these stories all week of pain, addiction, failing marriages and loneliness. And I think maybe our parents lied to us when we were kids. Nobody said life was going to be this hard, that we’re going to have to work, and there is going to be this blood and pain. The most prep we got on it was when we were complaining about how things aren’t fair and our Dad said, “life’s not fair”. Then we get to be thirty and we realize he was right. Sometimes I feel like all those “happily ever after” stories were lies. The six page children stories that had only one page of conflict and all the rest was “happily ever after” are misleading. I grew up thinking that I was supposed to meet my princess and she would be eternally romantic and loving. We would have plenty of money, nice houses and cars, and kids who obey our every command—we would live happily every after. I don’t think my time in church has helped this idea at all. They always want to put people on stage who have had this miraculous healing, but never the person who gets saved and then admits that he’s still confused, still has doubts, and can’t shake all his addictions. Most of us don’t identify well with the miracle man. Not to discount the miraculous healing; I’ve seen it happen, but that’s not the norm for most of us. Most of us find ourselves at the beginning of a journey with a lot of pain or we find ourselves in the middle with a lot of confusion and doubt. The funny thing is that we’ve been talking about sex and relationships, but it’s manifested itself in all these different places. There are people who want to know Jesus, but they can’t get their mind and their heart around it. Then there are those who can talk theology but are dead inside. We’ve discovered this week that we have a lot of people here wandering around in the wilderness of the soul.

I want us to look at one of the craziest stories in the Bible. This surreal book is what is called a symbolic act. Turn to **Hosea 1:1-9**. Hosea is filled with frustration, pain, hope, and healing. God tells Hosea, "I'm going to make your life a symbol." It sounds exciting until God clarifies, "I want you to marry a hooker." And He goes on to say, "Have kids with her." So Hosea obeys and marries Gomer and they have kids. They have three kids very quickly, in fact every time she weans one she has another. God tells Hosea to name his kids, Jezreel, Lo-ruhamah, and Lo-ammi. Now the people of God have been divided into two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, and because of Judah's worshipping of idols, God is going to destroy them. Verse 4, "*I will punish the house...*" The name, Jezreel means God will sow in vengeance. So they have this son and God tells them to name him, "I'm going to kill all of you." Verse 5, "I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel." Next comes a daughter named Lo-ruhamah which means no mercy. So this is my oldest son, I'm going to kill you all and this is my daughter, no mercy. And this is my wife...the prostitute. Verse 9, "*I am not your God.*" Lo-ammi means, "not mine". As this book goes on this family is increasingly dysfunctional. Even while Gomer is having children she continues in prostitution. In fact, later in the story, she finds herself cast into slavery and Hosea has to go down to the market and buy her back. God put it in Hosea's heart to love her. I cannot fathom the amount of shame, hurt, and pain that has to take place when Hosea has to go down to the market and find his wife naked on the stand while men make bids for her. But Hosea is obedient through all of this. It's clear that other people's sin can hurt us.

I love the prophet Jeremiah, because he hated his job. They call him the reluctant prophet. God came to him and said if you obey me I will give you the power to build up nations and to destroy them. What man is not going to jump all over that? But what ends up happening is that every time he opens his mouth and prophesies, someone kicks the trash out of him and throws him in a ditch. So by Jeremiah, chapter 20, he's in a ditch all beat up and he cries out against God, "You have deceived me!" He is saying that God has seduced him! He prophesies and prophesies and Israel never repents. So the nation of Israel, along with Jeremiah, are sent into exile. This man who is totally obedient keeps getting whooped. Now that doesn't preach too well—we don't like to talk about that one. What about Jesus? He didn't die because of His sins. It wasn't until I got married and started having kids that I was totally aware that my choices toward obedience and disobedience would have a direct affect on the ones I love. And that's terrifying to me. So I used to pray that every time my wedding ring would clink against something, I would be reminded how my sin affects my wife and my daughter. And when my daughter was born I bought this necklace with St. Christopher on it. Now I don't pray to it or anything, but St. Christopher was this saint who helped people get across this river. The story goes that he put this one girl on his back to transport her safely, but the weight almost killed him. So I wear this necklace and pray that God would remind me that every time I see it, I would remember that my decisions can get us across the river or they can get us swept away. My sin affects those around me. And sometimes it's our own sin that hurts us. Like Moses' blatant disobedience that kept him from entering into the promise land. Sometimes it's our own sin that leads us into the wilderness of the soul. Galatians says that God will not be made a fool of, we are going to reap what we sow. Sometimes it's not our sin or someone else's sin, but just that we live in a fallen world. And there are a million other reasons we may find ourselves in the wilderness. But what I want to do is flip over to Hosea, chapter 2 because it is going to say some things about the wilderness of the soul that will provide some help for us.

Hosea 2:14) "*Therefore, behold, I will allure her, Bring her into the wilderness And speak kindly to her...*" God's saying He going to go out into the wilderness with her. We are not being cast out into the wilderness alone with the hope that we learn something. God is going with us. I am sure of this; the wilderness is coming for all of us. No one escapes it, whether it is a dark night of the soul, spiritual callousness, or heartbreak. It's coming for all of us. And in that moment we have the opportunity to rail against God, but I don't know what that gets us but angrier and more bitter. If we would understand that God has not cast us into the wilderness, and in those troubled nights of the soul He whispers sweetly. He never says, "I told you so!" He never says, "If you just would of..." Remember the whore at the well; did Jesus not so sweetly whisper to her that he had water that could make her clean? What does He say to Zacchaeus, the drunk, little thief? Jesus calls him down and has dinner at his house. It baffled everybody in town and they were angry about it. What about the woman caught in adultery? Or what about Song of Solomon and its symbolism reflecting our relationship to Jesus as the Bride of Christ? She considers herself unworthy of His love and yet He longs to be with her. Even when she runs and hides in the highest point of the cleft of

the rock, the King chases her down. He stands at the mouth of the cave and says, “Oh, my dove in the cleft of the rock, how beautiful is your form.” He whispers sweetly, “You are not alone. I have not abandoned you.” We don’t get cast into despair; we get accompanied there.

Hosea 2:15) *“Then I will give her her vineyards from there, And the valley of Achor as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, As in the days when she came up from the land of Egypt.”* These lines constitute a promise that God has not cast you out. I am walking with you, not berating you or beating you up, but whispering sweetly and kindly to you, reminding you that you are here and when this is over, you will have your vineyards back. Vineyards are something you see throughout the New Testament and what does it refer to—wine. Wine is about celebration. We also see that the Valley of Achor, the Valley of Trouble, is a door of hope. What He’s saying is that this is not your home. It won’t be like this forever. So He says, “I am here; I have not cast you out. There will come a day when we will celebrate again. This valley of trouble serves a purpose so don’t lose hope. There is a tomorrow and I have given you all the grace and all the strength you need to survive today. My mercies are new and I will give you enough to survive tomorrow when it comes. After you start having kids, there are passages in the Scriptures that begin to make sense to you. This one in **Hosea 2:15** is like that, “...she will sing there as in the days of her youth...” My daughter, who is two and a half, just graduated from her class here at the Village. She was given a CD with seventeen songs that the teachers played. That CD goes with us wherever we go! As I hear her sing, I know that she feels very safe, there are no worries. All her needs are covered so she is singing. Her daddy is looking out for her. So God is saying, “I am walking with you and listen to my voice while we are out here. You are going to be tempted to lose heart, but don’t because I am here with you. I love you! You are not alone; I have not abandoned you. I know it is bad right now, but there is coming a time when the wine is going to flow again. We are going to dance and sing. The valley of trouble has a purpose, it is not random—I am doing something. I brought you out here. I allured you. Walk with me and don’t lose heart.”

My favorite verse of Hosea, chapter 2, is verse 16, “*And it will come about in that day,*” declares the Lord, “*that you will call Me Ishi And will no longer call Me Baali.*” God is saying that out here in the dark night of the soul, when all is said and done, you will call me husband and stop calling me master. Now let’s get our mind out of the West. Christianity is not a Western religion; it is Eastern and that means word pictures with stacks of layers and meaning. An Eastern teacher might say that Jesus is a rock. An Eastern mind would meditate about that, but we in the West would ask what kind of rock, how many, or what would be in the middle of it if we cut it open? So when God says, “I will be your husband,” He is talking about three words: raw-aw, ahabah, and dode. God is saying that out here where it is cold, dark, and sometimes feels never ending, we are going to get this raw-aw thing down. You are going to stop following the rules of a master; you are going to know me because this valley of trouble is going to force the issue. Do we not have testimonies? When do you pray the best? I would bank that it is when you are bleeding. God says, “You are also going to learn about My ahabah because I’m not going anywhere. And when we get out of here—dode!” You know anytime you throw dode out there in relationship to God, people tend to cringe. It’s like you are talking about sex and God; people don’t get it. Look at it this way; there is this thing that God does to the soul that goes beyond friendship. The only way I know how to explain it is to quote a man like David who said, “I pant for you like the deer pants for water”—that is not buddies. David said, “I think of you through the watches of the night.” You wouldn’t say that to your buddy, at least I hope not! One of the reasons that I love David so much is because he had these moments where he said, “I love You, I yearn for You, You are awesome,” and then seven verses later, is asking God where He is. David reads like real life! Can we not identify?

So here’s the thing, I don’t think that we got lied to. I just think that children’s books should be longer. Instead of seven to ten pages, they should be 9,000 pages long. The first three should set up this cool adventure and then the next 8,670 should be filled with strife. Then the last twenty pages should be awesome. At the very end, it should say “happily ever after”. Then when we finish reading that book, our kids are twenty-six or twenty-seven and they already know. So we got all these desperate e-mails this week but they weren’t all bad. Sprinkled in there like salt, were some hopeful ones, i.e., my marriage was reconciled after all this awful stuff. So sprinkled in with all the pain, suffering, and despair was hope. Not cheap, easy, churchy hope, but hope that tomorrow and then tomorrow, and then for all the tomorrows, healing and reconciliation is ours. This is hard stuff in a culture that loves everything in a microwave

because we want it now, and sometimes it isn't going to happen now. Here's the deal—we have these sweet promises in the Bible that say wherever we are tonight, we haven't been abandoned. It isn't about if only we had had our quiet time and prayed, this awful thing wouldn't have happened. We try to earn what was freely given by trying to live it "right". We haven't been cast out, we have been allured—it is different. So let's tune our ears and we will find Him whispering His ahabah to us, "I'm not going anywhere." One day God promises that we won't just have a checklist of rules, but a husband with raw-aw, ahabah, and the mingling of souls.