

GOD'S LASTING LOVE

Hosea 11:1-4

*1 When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.
2 The more they called them,
The more they went from them;
They kept sacrificing to the Baals
And burning incense to idols.
3 Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in My arms;
But they did not know that I healed them.
4 I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,
And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws;
And I bent down and fed them. (Hosea 11:1-4).*

The book of Hosea is a story of troubled love. The trouble is that the love has been extended but not returned. The love in this story has been going one way.

To illustrate the point, Hosea has become a living parable of the relationship between God and His people. Hosea has been instructed by God to take a wife whose past history lends itself to unfaithfulness. The shame she has brought on the prophet is hinted at the names that have been given to the children. One of them has been given the name, Lo-ammi, "Not mine."

As we come to the eleventh chapter of the book, we have left behind that section that looks at Hosea and Gomer and we have also left its corresponding picture of the Lord and Israel as His unfaithful bride. There is instead a different metaphor in use. It is the picture of the Lord as the Father of Israel. The Lord calls Israel in verse 1, not "My bride," but "My son."

Israel is described here in Hosea 11 as the son of God. It was not an unknown designation. When Moses was sent to stand before the Pharaoh in Exodus 4:22, he was told to say, "Thus says the LORD, 'Israel is My son, My first-born.'" God expressed His love for Israel in terms of the love of a father.

That touches a nerve because there is something within all of us that hungers for the love of a father. Perhaps you are one who hungered for that which was not given. That is very

often the case. Or perhaps you had the love of your earthly father but still hungered for a greater expression of that love and acceptance than which you perceived. I can still hear the words of my younger brother as we wrapped our arms around one another at the funeral of our father as he said, “Why didn’t he ever talk to me?”

It is to such a heart’s desire that the Lord speaks in this passage as He expresses His love for His people as well as His own heart-longing for that love to be returned.

GOD’S LASTING LOVE IS SEEN FOR ISRAEL

1. God’s Lasting Love for Israel is seen in the Exodus Event.

*When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son. (Hosea 11:1).*

God’s love has a history. There is a grand and glorious story to God’s love. He looks back to the birth of the nation of Israel and He remembers and then He reminds us of that event.

I remember the birth of my daughter. I have to confess that, in my youth, I had prayed for a son and I prayed believing and this was before the age of sonograms, so it was a bit of a surprise when the doctor came out of the delivery room carrying this little newborn bundle and said, “You have a daughter.” The look on my face might have expressed that surprise because he opened the blanket and said, “See!”

Let me say for the record that I treasure my daughter and that I cannot imagine being any more proud of a child than I am of her. She is a delight and a joy and I make it a regular practice to express that to her in both word and in deed.

I can still remember seeing that tiny bundle of arms and legs and a full head of hair and thinking how this person now depended upon me for her livelihood. I had a child and my life would forever be impacted by that fact.

The Exodus had that kind of impact on a cosmic scale. It was an earth-shattering event. It was a time when the Nile turned to blood and when the sun turned black. It was a time when plague after plague brought the mightiest kingdom in the world to its knees. The Nile bled, frogs flowed, and the land literally crawled with swarms upon swarms of insects. The heavens rained hail and the African sun conspired to plunge the world into darkness.

The magnitude of the afflictions upon Egypt was surpassed only by the Pharaoh's stubborn and hardened heart as he tried to hold on to his Israelite slaves. It was not until his own son along with every firstborn child in the entire land was put to death that the Pharaoh finally relented.

The defining event for God's saving love in the Old Testament is the Exodus. Repeatedly, the Old Testament writers point to this as the time when the Lord bared His mighty arm and made His power known throughout the world and especially to Israel, His chosen people.

The point that I want you to see is that God's love has a history. There is a grand and glorious story to God's love and, if you have become a member of the family of God through faith in Christ, you have become a part of that story and you are called to remember how your story has become entwined with the love of God.

2. God's Lasting Love for Israel is seen in their Supernatural Preservation.

*Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in My arms;
But they did not know that I healed them. (Hosea 11:3).*

The reference to teaching Ephraim to walk takes me back some 33 years to when Sky, our daughter, was still a toddler and had not yet learned even to crawl. Paula and I would take turns watching her while the other went down for some exercise and it was one afternoon while Paula was at an exercise class that I decided to teach Sky how to crawl.

She would lay on her stomach with her head up and all her arms and legs would thrash wildly about, but she had not learned to use them as a source of locomotion. On this day, I picked her up and placed her on the carpet, carefully positioning all of her arms and legs under her before taking away my supporting hand. She remained in place for a moment before pitching forward on her face. It was a double thick carpet, so no damage was done by this action. I picked her up and went through the process again. And again. And again. Finally we did it and she held her position for a moment and then was off across the carpet. One step. Two steps. Three. And then a falter and she pitched forward onto her face. I raised her up against and again she was off. By the time Paula returned from her class, Sky could make it all the way across the apartment, though in those years, that was not a terribly far distance.

We have already seen that verse 1 likens the Exodus event to the birth of a child. In the case of Egypt, it was an unwanted pregnancy. Egypt did everything in her

power to bring about an abortion and to kill this unwanted child. But the hand of the Lord intervened and protected the people of Israel.

This supernatural preservation did not stop when the people of Israel came out of Egypt. It only began there. An entire nation was supernaturally fed and sustained in the Sinai wilderness. That was perhaps an even greater miracle than the Exodus event itself. There were no Burger Kings in the Sinai. No fast food restaurants. No supermarkets. The Lord preserved them through forty years of wandering in the desert.

And then, when it came time to enter into the promised land, the Lord again paved the way before them. The problem with the Promised Land was that there were others who were already on that land and who had cities and armies and fortifications and, in some cases, the latest advances in weaponry. But the Lord established the Israelites in that land and preserved them and protected them.

Israel should have known this, but their awareness of their own preservation seems to have been like that of a toddler. You mothers know what I mean. That little baby begins to crawl and to explore and the mother's job turns into a non-stop, 26 hour a day vigil to make sure that little one does not eat or drink or touch or bring on that which will do extensive bodily harm. A toddler doesn't know about poison or a burning stove or an electrical socket or the laws of gravity. All of these things can maim or kill, but the toddler is blissfully unaware of any of it. A toddler isn't aware that he is being kept alive by the guardianship of his mother.

There have been times when I am sure that the hand of the Lord reached out and protected me from what would have been certain death. But I have a feeling that there were many other times when that same preservation and protection was in place and I was blissfully unaware that there was even a hint of danger. God says, "I love you and I am protecting you, even when you don't know there is anything there from which you need protection."

That tells me something about the love of God. It tells me that God's love is often **subtle**. The Christmas season is just around the corner and it won't be too long before the Christmas trees are going up and there will be shopping sales and holiday hype and most of the world will ignore the fact that all the hoopla is about a baby that was born in Bethlehem. They miss it today and, quite frankly, they missed it back then because the love of God came in such a subtle manner. He could have written the words, "I love you" in great streams of fire across the sky. But He didn't. Instead He sent a baby to be born on the wrong side of the tracks and in a way that was so subtle that you can miss it if you try.

3. God's Lasting Love for Israel is seen Despite their Continuing Unfaithfulness.

*2 The more they called them,
The more they went from them;
They kept sacrificing to the Baals
And burning incense to idols. (Hosea 11:2).*

God expresses His love for His people, despite the fact that they had expressed a continuing unfaithfulness toward Him. Indeed, it seemed that there was a direct correlation between the intensity of His expressions of love and the degree of their rebellion against Him.

*The more they called them,
The more they went from them;*

The Lord sent prophet after prophet and Israel responded by going to worship idol after idol, bowing down and worshiping before images of wood and stone.

We read this and we think, "Boy, weren't they dumb!"

And then we are reminded what the New Testament has to say about the various forms of idolatry that are not quite so overt or so obvious.

*Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead
to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which
amounts to idolatry. (Colossians 3:5).*

Idolatry is defined as putting anything as of greater import or priority than the Lord. Greed is making me the priority. Where are your priorities? You answer that question and I will tell you whether you are engaged in idolatry.

We live in a society that has been defined by its materialism. That is only another way of saying that we live in a society that has been overcome with greed *which amounts to idolatry*.

4. God's Lasting Love for Israel is seen in both their Judgment and in their Restoration.

*I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,
And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws;
And I bent down and fed them. (Hosea 11:4).*

As Hosea writes these words, there are troubled times on the horizon. God had protected His people to this point, but there is a judgment coming that will be harsh and hurtful and horrifying and heartbreaking in its extent. The people of Israel are going to be forcibly removed from the land of promise and taken to a foreign land.

*5 They will not return to the land of Egypt;
But Assyria-- he will be their king,
Because they refused to return to Me.
6 And the sword will whirl against their cities,
And will demolish their gate bars
And consume them because of their counsels.
7 So My people are bent on turning from Me.
Though they call them to the One on high,
None at all exalts Him.
8 How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I surrender you, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim?
My heart is turned over within Me,
All My compassions are kindled. (Hosea 11:5-8).*

The judgment that will be brought against Israel will be extreme. From our vantage point in history, we can look back at that judgment and we can see just how extreme it was.

Yet the Lord is not pictured here as saying, “There, you got exactly what you deserved!” It is not a picture of gleeful triumph. Instead, it is a picture of kindled compassion. It is a picture of a God who hurts when we hurt and who feels our pain.

That is what the incarnation was all about. It was the time when God came near and was born into our world as a baby to grow up and walk our streets and rub shoulders with us and to feel our pain.

GOD’S LASTING LOVE IS SEEN FOR YOU

What is true of Israel is also true of the One who came to be the better Israel.

1. Jesus Came out of Egypt.

*When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son. (Hosea 11:1).*

This passage is quoted in Matthew 2 where the infant Jesus is taken by his parents down to Egypt to escape the plots of King Herod. The writer is letting us know that, even though the context spoke of God's love for Israel and His bringing Israel out of Egypt, it also spoke of the Lord bringing His Son who is the better Israel out of Egypt.

What was true of Israel was also true of Jesus. Israel was brought up out of Egypt and Jesus was also brought up out of Egypt. The Exodus event became the defining event as it gave birth to the nation of Israel and Jesus also engaged in an Exodus event that gave birth to the new Israel.

When Luke tells us of the transfiguration, we read that Moses and Elijah appeared as they were talking with Jesus and that *they were speaking of His **departure** which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem (Luke 9:31)*. The Greek word translated departure is the word *exodos*. It is speaking of His death upon the cross.

What the exodus was to the Old Testament in that it gave birth to the nation of Israel, the cross was to the New Testament as it is the source of our own new birth. It is the cross that releases us from our spiritual servitude and sets us free.

2. Jesus came to Heal and to Comfort and to Preserve.

*Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in My arms;
But they did not know that I healed them. (Hosea 11:3).*

We regularly speak of the healing ministry of Jesus as providing the divine authorization for His teaching and saving ministry. One of the reasons you could believe the message of Jesus is because the miracles He performed served to authenticate the man and His message. But that is not the sum total of their purpose. They were also designed to heal and to comfort and to preserve.

The miracles of Jesus were utilitarian. They were signs but they were not just signs. They also ministered to real people with real needs. They healed the sick. They made the lame to walk and they opened the eyes of the blind and they caused the deaf to hear. They were practical and they were effectual.

I used to say that I am a Christian, not because it works, but because it is true. I still maintain the validity of such a statement, but I also have to add that

Christianity works. There is what Norm Wise calls a sane and stable spirituality to be found in Christianity.

3. Jesus came because of our Continuing Unfaithfulness.

*2 The more they called them,
The more they went from them;
They kept sacrificing to the Baals
And burning incense to idols. (Hosea 11:2).*

Jesus came because of our sin and because of our idolatry. The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

One of the charges that I regularly hear against Christianity is that the church is full of hypocrites. That is because people have somehow gotten the mistaken notion that the church is made up of a bunch of good people trying to be a little better and who spend their time looking down their noses at those who do not measure up.

But that is not Christianity. Christianity says that no one measures up. Christians are those who are not good and know it and have confessed their sin and the fact that they are so bad that they needed the perfect Son of God to come and die in their place.

We are not good people trying to be better; we are beggars telling other beggars where we found bread.

Jesus did not come because we were good. He did not come because we were nice. He came because of our continuing unfaithfulness. He came to die in our place because that is the only way in which we could be saved. This brings us to the next point.

4. Jesus took the Yoke of our Judgment upon Himself so that we could be Restored to what we were meant to be.

*I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,
And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws;
And I bent down and fed them. (Hosea 11:4).*

God calls us to holy living, but because we have failed to live that sort of holy life, He sent His Son to live the life we should have lived and to die the death we deserved to die and He served as the great substitute who lived and died in my

place.

And now, He echoes back the words of Hosea 11:4 as He says to us, “I became to you as one who lifts your yoke, now come and believe the gospel and *take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls.*” (Matthew 11:29).

The way some Christians act, you would think that this passage called us to come and to be tired. Jesus did not say that. He calls us to come and to find rest.

Have you come to Him?

Have you entered into His rest?

Have you stopped kicking against the goads and running from the Lord and have you come to Him and surrendered yourself to Him?