

All My Compassion

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[0 : 00] Well, this past week I was reading the words of the prophet Hosea. Ancient words. And at times, heart-wrenching words. Reading Hosea takes us back to a time where the relationship between God and his people Israel was full of sorrow and grief.

You can't help but grieve over the way the people of Israel treated Yahweh, their God. And you can't help but mourn over the anguish in God's own heart because of Israel.

They were faithless people in that day. No longer loyal to their God. Wicked. Corrupt. It really is a heart-wrenching book of the Bible.

And it is hard to listen as God promises to punish the sins of Israel again and again and again through Hosea. Reading of this reminded me of Alive and how we've been journeying with the kids through the first books of the Bible, the beginnings of the story of Israel.

And there, too, we saw some pretty heart-wrenching moments. We saw God's anger and wrath flare up against the people of Israel because of their sins. We heard God tell Moses on more than one occasion to stand aside so that he might destroy the people of Israel.

[1 : 26] And it might be tempting as we hear and read things like these to come to the conclusion that God is mostly just angry with us.

Or to come to the conclusion that God is mainly just disappointed with us. Or to come to the conclusion that God doesn't really love us.

He just kind of puts up with us. Of course, naturally, we don't like to hear about God punishing sinful people like us.

And there's a lot of that in the Old Testament where God spoke these heart-wrenching words of judgment.

And sometimes we might be tempted to try and separate the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New Testament. Some have commented here and there that they really like Jesus.

[2 : 29] Gentle, loving, gracious, lowly, humble Jesus. The one who died for us. But they don't really much like the God of the Old Testament.

He's too angry. Too wrathful. Look at what he did to the people of Israel when they grumbled and complained, some will say. He was angry and he struck many of them down with fire and plague and disaster.

But this kind of thinking really falls short of reality. As we've been seeing in the Gospel of John over the past weeks and months, there's really no way around it. There is no such division in the Bible.

The God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. Who is Jesus referring to when he speaks of his Father? The one who sent him into the world.

It's none other than Yahweh, the Lord, the God of the Old Testament. And Jesus does not in the least distance himself from the God of the Old Testament. In fact, it's the opposite.

[3 : 37] He says, I and the Father are one. As we'll see in a couple weeks here, he says, How can you say, show me the Father? If you've seen me, you've seen the Father.

In other words, Jesus is saying, I am Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, here in flesh, walking among you. He is in me.

I am in him. We are one. When you look at me, you see him, says Jesus. So there is no divide between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament.

Everything about who God is in the Old Testament is true about God in the New Testament. And everything about who Jesus is in the New Testament reflects who the God of the Old Testament really is.

You might think, well, how come Jesus doesn't seem as angry and wrathful as God does in the Old Testament? Well, let me remind you that Jesus did on occasion get very angry.

[4 : 43] At the temple courts, he was angry with a righteous anger at how they had turned the house of God into a marketplace. He showed the same sort of righteous anger against the Pharisees, those corrupt and hypocritical leaders who were abusing and taking advantage of the people while putting on a religious facade.

And it is true that we never see Jesus punish or bring judgment like God did in the Old Testament. But that's because there are two stages to the work of Jesus here on earth.

As we heard earlier in John's Gospel, chapter 3, verse 17, For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

And we've talked about this. Jesus' first coming was a rescue mission. It's all about redemption. It's about saving us. But Jesus' second coming will include punishment and judgment for the wicked, just like God did in the Old Testament.

Consider 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 6. It says there, God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well.

[6 : 09] This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

So yes, Jesus will punish and will bring judgment, just like God did in the Old Testament. These two realities of who God is cannot be separated.

God is love. And God is just. God is good. He loves what is good. And therefore he hates what is evil.

And he must punish evil. He must purge evil from his creation at some time. And probably most of us deep in our hearts, we know this is true.

We know that this is who God is. And yet we still struggle to see the love that God has for us. As we read in places like Hosea.

[7 : 12] About his anger and hatred towards sin. And so this morning I want to draw your attention to one of the places in the Old Testament. Where we see so clearly God's love for sinners like you and me.

Hosea chapter 11. Verse 1. This is God speaking through Hosea.

He says, When Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.

They sacrificed to the balls and they burned incense to images. When Israel was a child, I loved him.

Hear those words. We're reminded again here of the story of Jacob. One of the stories that we covered in Alive this past year. Jacob, he was later renamed Israel by God.

[8 : 18] And he was special. He was deeply loved by God. Even from the time he was a little boy. He had his own relationship with Yahweh, the Lord.

And it kind of grew. We saw how it grew over time. Towards the end of his life. As God took him out of the land and then brought him back in.

And God reaffirmed his covenant and his promise to Jacob. And so not only Israel, the man, was precious to God. But Israel, the people. Those descended from Israel were like a son to God.

And dear children that he loved. Verse 2. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me.

They sacrificed to the balls and they burned incense to images. Do you hear the anguish of a father's heart? God called them out of slavery and depression in Egypt.

[9 : 20] To be his own special free people. And yet they continually gave God the cold shoulder. And gave their worship and their love to idols.

To the false gods of the other nations. Verse 3. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk. Ephraim was one of the sons of Joseph.

And he was the grandson of Jacob. And Ephraim's name is often used by God here in Hosea to refer to the whole northern kingdom of Israel. Ephraim was one of the sons of Joseph.

But listen to this. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk. Taking them by the arms. But they did not realize it was I who healed them.

I led them with cords of human kindness. With ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek. And I bent down to feed them.

[10 : 21] This is wonderful. Do you hear the heart of God towards Israel? The people. To help illustrate this I'm going to borrow my daughter for a second.

Hi. Nobody's going to forget this by the way. We like to do little things with her. Let's see if she's going to be able to.

Can you stand? Yeah, look at that. Can you take a step? Maybe. When we do that, that's often the time she smiles the most.

Isn't it wonderful to see the tender love of a father, between a father and his child?

As he teaches his child to walk. Holding them by the arms so they don't fall over. While they build strength, coordination, balance.

[11 : 43] It takes gentleness. It takes gentleness. It takes patience. It takes patience. Tenderness. And it brings great joy.

Not only do I enjoy that, but I just enjoy holding this little one. Giving her snuggles. Oftentimes I find myself just grabbing her and hugging her and kissing her.

I delight in her. I treasure her so much. That's what really got me thinking as I read these words.

God is speaking to Israel. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk. Taking them by the arms. I led them with cords of human kindness.

With ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek. I bent down to feed them. This is God reflecting on his relationship with Israel from those first days where he led them out of Egypt.

[12 : 54] Through the wilderness. Into the promised land. I'll give her back to you.

So yes, there were those moments when God's anger flared up because of their sin and their wickedness. Their behaviors and attitudes. Yes, there were those moments in which he punished them for their sins.

But through all that, in the middle of all that, there was this too. This heart of God towards his people.

He saw them. He loved them. He cherished them. Like a father loves his own child. He was patient with them. Teaching them to walk.

He was tender. He was tender. He was tender. He was tender. He was near to them.

[13 : 56] Like a father who lifts his little child to his cheek. He humbly stooped down to their level. To feed them.

To care for them. To care for them. To provide for their needs. This is the same tender, compassionate, kind, humble love.

From the God of the Old Testament. As we see from Jesus in the New Testament. Then we come to verse 7.

My people are determined to turn from me. Even though they call me God Most High. I will by no means exalt them.

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Adma? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me.

[14 : 59] All my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger. Nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God and not a man.

The Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities. These are wonderful words. In verse 7, God makes clear the fault of the people of Israel.

They are determined to turn from me, he says. Not just that they happen to wander away sometimes. But they are determined. There is a continual deliberateness to it.

And how does God feel about it? How does he respond to it? What will he do? What they deserve is punishment. What they deserve, as we've heard throughout the Old Testament, is to be wiped off the face of the earth.

But listen to the heart of God here. He says, how can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? Do you hear the reluctance in the heart of God to bring punishment on his dear children of Israel?

[16 : 11] It's like he's saying, I don't want to give you up. I don't want to hand you over to your enemies. How can I treat you like Adma?

How can I make you like Zeboiim? Adma and Zeboiim were two of the cities that God laid waste and utterly destroyed back in the days when he wiped out Sodom and Gomorrah because of their sin and wickedness.

It's like God is saying, I don't want to do that to you, dear Israel. But the problem here is that they deserve it.

These people of Israel, here and now, are as deserving of punishment and judgment as Adma and Zeboiim were in the days when God punished them. But God says here, it would break my heart to bring justice upon you like that, my son, my children, Israel.

My heart is changed within me, says the Lord. All my compassion is aroused. And in God's compassion, he resolves, he decides at the time of this prophecy not to punish Israel, not to allow the cities of Ephraim to be destroyed again.

[17 : 46] As I was reflecting on these words, I couldn't help but notice, they really give us a window into the heart of God. I mean, look at this, both in verse 8 and in verse 9.

And in verse 9, I will not carry out my fierce anger. Why? Because all my compassion is aroused. Here we see two different emotions in the heart of God.

At the same time, we see a fierce anger, a strong desire to punish the wicked, to bring justice. And at the very same time, we see an even fiercer compassion rising up in the heart of God, a love, a care for the people, a compassion that triumphs over the fierce anger.

It's as though God is saying, I love you, Israel. Even though you are wicked, I love you. Even though you've turned away from me, I cannot bear to give you the punishment that you deserve. How can I treat you like Adma? How can I make you like Zeboiim? For I am God and not a man.

[19 : 05] These words are worth meditating on. What does God mean here? He seems to be saying that there's a big difference between me and you.

What goes on in the heart of God is not the same as what goes on in the heart of a man. Think about this. Though we are sinful and deserving of God's punishment, and though we desire God's forgiveness, and mercy, we are still far less patient, compassionate, and forgiving than God is. Were we, as sinful human beings, the ones in charge, in God's position here, being treated the way that God is being treated by His people, anger and wrath would almost certainly triumph over mercy.

But isn't it wonderful that God is different than we are? He's untainted by sin. He is holy. He is good to His very core.

And so compassion will triumph over anger, over judgment. And though there are more heart-wrenching words of judgment from Hosea in the chapters that follow, the words of Hosea end with wonderful promises of mercy and compassion.

[20 : 36] I'll read just a few of them from chapter 14. Return, Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall. Take words with you and return to the Lord.

Say to Him, forgive all our sins and receive us graciously that we may offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria cannot save us. We will not mount war horses.

We will never again say our gods to what our own hands have made. For in you, the fatherless, find compassion. I will heal their waywardness and love them freely.

For my anger has turned away from them. Says the Lord. This is the God of the Old Testament. And this is the God of the New Testament.

He is fearsome in His goodness, purity, and righteousness. But He is and He always has been fiercely compassionate, abundantly gracious, tender, kind, gentle, patient, willing to stoop down to care for us.

[21 : 59] That sweet love of a father towards his little child is the way God is with His people. We are just as dear, just as precious, just as loved.

And the place that we see that most powerfully demonstrated is at the cross. We may be wondering as we read these words of Hosea, if the people really were that wicked, then they deserve to be wiped out like Adma and Zeboiim, like Sodom and Gomorrah.

How can God just have a change of heart and be compassionate towards them and not give them what they deserve? How can He just forgive them of all their sins?

How can His righteous anger turn away from them, turn away from us forever? And that's what Jesus' death on the cross is all about. Out of God's fierce compassion, He made a remedy for our sin and our guilt.

He established a cure to our waywardness. He planned a way to see justice done and sinners like you and me pardoned, forgiven, completely, forever.

[23 : 20] The divine Son of God, Jesus, came down into our world. He took on human flesh and became one of us and then suffered and died. The punishment we deserved in our place was upon Him so that we could be saved.

So that instead of death and judgment, instead, we who repent and believe in His name can have life and blessing forever with God as His dear children.

God, this is the good news of Jesus and that's what we are here to celebrate this morning as we come to the Lord's table, as we partake of bread and cup.

If you believe this with all your heart, then I want to invite you to partake with us this morning. If you believe that Jesus died to atone for your sins, to bring you back into a loving relationship with God like we see between God and Israel here in this passage, I invite you, join with us, partake with us, eat and drink with us.

The bread stands for Jesus' body which was broken for us and the cup stands for Jesus' blood which was poured out, shed for us for our forgiveness.

[24 : 39] We'll take a few minutes to pray quietly now and then we'll have Charles and Dave come and serve the elements and we'll wait until everybody has received both who wishes to partake and then we'll eat and drink together in unison after we give thanks.

So let's go now to prayer. dinner. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Father in heaven, thank you that you have loved us with such a deep and tender and awesome love as you have.

Like a father, his dear child. Thank you that you sent Jesus into our world. For Jesus, thank you that you came willingly and that you endured all that you did and laid down your life for us.

[27 : 35] Thank you that we are forgiven by your blood. That we have life forever with you because of what you did for us at the cross.

We love you. And we give you glory. We give you praise. Amen.