

God's Parental Love

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[0 : 00] Well, for a short time, let's turn back as we seek the Lord's help in our understanding of Scripture in Hosea, chapter 11, and looking at verses 1 to 11, mostly at the first part of that passage. When Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away. They kept sacrificing to the baals and burning offerings to idols. If we think ministers today have a tough time, think about this man, Hosea.

It puts what we call a tough time into perspective, because the first word of the Lord to him was this, as you find in chapter 1. When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom, and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord. So he went and took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. The Lord required Hosea to live out in his life, in his relationship with his unfaithful wife, to live out the relationship between God and the people of Israel.

Israel had abandoned the Lord in practice. They had gone after the baals, the gods of Canaan. And that was all pictured for them in Hosea's marriage and family life. His wife left him. She went to live with someone else. Chapter 3, which really gives us, in a sense, the key to the whole book of Hosea, again, the Lord commands Hosea to go and buy her back, take her back, and ensure that she stays with you from now on. As the Lord loves Israel. That's the whole key to the book of Hosea, the prophet. As the Lord loves Israel. Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods. So what you find, really, in the whole of Hosea's prophecy is a portrayal in his own life, in his own relationship, in the things he tells us about himself. It's a portrayal. It's a picture.

It's an image of that broken relationship between God and his people Israel, his covenant people. But it's especially a portrayal that emphasizes the continuing love of God, the caring love of God.

[2 : 59] We're giving our study a title, God's paternal love. The fatherly love of God, as it comes across in this passage and in this book of Hosea. In other words, you see from the prophecy of Hosea, the beauty of God's love, the beauty of God's love, the strength of God's love for his people, the commitment of God in his love as he provides for his people, as he appeals to them to come back to himself. And the more you find the beauty of God's love put across to us from the book of Hosea, the more you come to appreciate something of the ugliness of sin, of the ugliness of departing from God, of the seriousness of giving our worship and our attention to anyone else or anything else in the place of God.

And in this chapter here, in God's appeal to Israel, he's taking them back to what he refers to pictorially as the time of their youth, the time of their childhood, the time when he came to Egypt to rescue them out of Egypt and all that was affecting them in Egypt as they were slaves in Egypt, badly treated in Egypt and the bondage of Egypt. God's taking them back to that and showing them the quality of the love that rescued them. And there are four aspects to that love that are truly precious to ourselves surely today. It's first of all, the love which powerfully rescues. In the first verse of the chapter, when Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt, I called my son. When you see God described in the book of Exodus as coming to look down upon the people of Israel in Egypt, when you come to see how he describes himself as pitying them in their distress, this is telling you that it's in love that he is looking towards these people in their bondage in Egypt, in the way in which they are kept there in such slavery, in such terrible conditions.

And that really is a picture of the love of God which rescues us from our bondage and sin. Which is why the Bible frequently refers to Egypt as something that these people of God were never to go back to. He rescued them from Egypt, not so that they would go back to Egypt. That's why the emphasis so often in the Old Testament on Israel still in their heart hankering after the things of Egypt, that's really the same thing as spiritually saying, you've been rescued from your sin, from a

lifestyle of sin, whatever it was like and to whatever degree you and I showed that lifestyle of sin. God rescued us from that if we today know his salvation, if we know a saving relationship with Jesus Christ, if our trust is in him. This is what God is saying, when you were a child, when I looked upon you in your sin, when I saw you in my love, it was such a powerful love that rescued you and set you into a new life. And you are not to go back to Egypt again.

You know that in your own heart as a Christian, don't you? You know sometimes the appeal of the world, the appeal of the sin in our own hearts, the appeal of worldliness, the deceitfulness of sin. We're all aware of that, which is why so frequently the Lord sets out the quality of his own love before us so that every time we find ourselves either straying from God or thinking about straying from God or tempted to stray from God, you look at the quality of God's love and God is saying to you, how could you?

[7:16] How could you possibly, when I loved you with such a powerful love, has rescued you? And he says, out of Egypt I called my son. How did God rescue them out of Egypt? And what is this saying to us in spiritual terms? Well, of course he came by providing them with a leader, providing them with Moses, who was brought up in the household of Pharaoh, who knew the things of Egypt so well, and who led the people under God's direction out of Egypt on into the wilderness and on towards the promised land. And that too is a picture for us of what spiritually is meant by this, out of Egypt, I called my son. God rescues us with his powerful love when he comes to call us to himself, what the New Testament calls, calling us out of darkness into his marvelous light, as you find in 1 Peter.

It's a call which addresses us summons, really. It's God by his spirit coming into our situation of lostness, into the bondage of our spiritual Egypt, and through that call, which is a summons to come to himself, to place our confidence in him, to leave Egypt, to start following him. That's God's powerful love at work. Nothing less than that. Out of Egypt I called my son.

You remember when Moses was sent back to Pharaoh by God, that one of the things God said to Moses, he was to declare to Pharaoh, was this, Israel is my son, my firstborn. Now let my son go. And of course, Pharaoh steadfastly refused until the time of that final devastating plague of death. Israel says, God is my son. They're my covenant people. They're held by you, Pharaoh, in bondage. Now let them go. That's what God is doing when he comes to you and to me in our sin, in the grip of sin, in the grip of death. And he speaks in his powerful love. He calls us out of that into his marvelous light.

And it's all to do with love. And it's not just love, it's fatherly love. A love which comes to call us out of our situation of sin and to establish us as spiritual children of God under his fatherly care. It is, first of all, a love which powerfully rescues. A love which comes to our lostness and to us in our lostness and which sets in motion the means by which we are rescued from that bondage, from that death, from that terrible dilemma, out of which we cannot rescue ourselves.

[10:17] What is your response today to this love, to this quality of love, to this fatherly love of God?

What's been the response in your life, in my own life? How am I today in relation to God and to this love of God, of all that it's provided, this power that God has in his love to rescue us from Egypt? That's the gospel, that's the emphasis that God is setting out for us today. It's a love which powerfully rescues. Secondly, it's a love, in verse 3, which patiently teaches. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk. You see, he's saying in the light of verse 2, the more they were called, the more they went away. They kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk. And now God is saying, not only did my powerful love rescue them from Egypt and set them on their way towards the promised land. This is the love that taught them to walk. I set them on their way. I dealt with them as my newly rescued or newborn child. And yet, despite that, they're set on going away from me. You look at the picture there, it's an absolutely beautiful picture. Hosea must have been drawing, of course, in a sense on his own experience too, as a parent, as a father. He would have known what this was in the bringing up of the children that his wife bore to him. What's he saying? I taught them to walk. I took them by the arms. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love. You see, this is a picture of a toddler that's just beginning to toddle or to walk. You know what that stage is like. It's a wonderful stage when you see an infant just coming to that stage of beginning to take the first steps in life, the first steps physically. And what happens to the mother, with the mother or father who's encouraging them to walk? Well, they reach out with their hands, don't they? Or even if it's a grandparent, the same thing

takes place there. They reach out with their hands so that in the first few tottering steps that that infant takes, these hands, these arms are there to actually meet them when they fall so that they don't hurt themselves.

But there's more than that to it, isn't there? Because when you reach out with your hands just to encourage the toddler, that's really what you're doing. Your hands are not just, your arms are not just outstretched to catch them if they should fall over, as they often do at that stage, but they're also there to encourage them because you're calling them towards you. You're saying, come on, take another step. It's myself. You'll be all right. It's dad. It's mom. And you know, that's what God is saying. I taught Ephraim to walk. It's the love which patiently teaches as you take your first steps as a Christian into the Christian life. Who is it that's there to catch you? Who is it that's there to reassure you? What sort of love is it that surrounds you, that encourages you? It's this love of God which patiently teaches you. And whenever you fall, who's there ready to catch you? Who's going to put you back on your feet again? Is it the minister? Is it the session? Is it an elder? Is it a fellow Christian?

Well, they may all help. But actually, it's this God in his love that does that. I taught them to walk. [14:05] I took them up by their arms. I led them with cords of kindness, with a bands of love. Is there anyone more patient than God? Is there anyone who has the quality of love that puts up with the likes of me and the likes of you in all our stumblings and all our failures and all our reluctance to accept him at his word? And today, if you're at that stage where you're thinking of following the Lord, you haven't yet perhaps committed yourself to the Lord, you may be afraid of the consequences of doing so.

you may be aware of some things that are happening in the world. You may be aware of something that's happened in other people's lives who are Christians. And God is saying to you, look, I'm there to catch you.

I'm there to encourage you. Come on, take your first steps. Look at my arms stretched out towards you. Look at the quality of my love.

Look at how I am the one who teaches you to walk spiritually, who upholds you, who puts you back on your feet if you do happen to stumble. What else do we need when we have the love of God as portrayed here by Hosea?

The love which powerfully rescues and the love which patiently teaches. Thirdly, in verse 4, it's a love which protectively cares.

[15:45] I led them with cords of kindness with the bands of love. And I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws. And I bent down to them and fed them.

Now the image changes very rapidly there from a tottering infant learning to walk to a bullock or a heifer. And in chapter 10, of course, he's describing Israel as his precious heifer or trained calf. In verse 11 of chapter 10, Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh. And I spared her fair neck. And what he's saying in chapter 11 here is I led them with cords of kindness with the bands of love.

We have to remember that in those days and even today in places in the world, a bullock or a heifer is an exceedingly precious animal. And if you are involved in supporting an organization like Compassion who sponsor children and different projects throughout the world, thousands of children, and you get these letters back from the children that you help to sponsor, sometimes if you send something extra for their birthday, you get a letter back with very excitedly telling you that they've used the money to buy a sheep or a goat or a hen.

Why? Because they're so valuable to them. They're not just ordinary commodities like you find on a supermarket shelf nowadays and you just pick it off and that's it. You pay for it. They don't have these resources.

[17:18] They're valuable. So was this bullock. So was this heifer. These animals that were trained to work the soil and to help bring in the harvest. Precious animals.

Animals that needed to be cared for. Animals that were so precious that they really deserved the best of care. And that's what Hosea is saying here, what God is saying through them about his love. It's a love which protectively cares. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love. Yes, they're united to God.

They're tied to him. And although they're straining to get away from God in their disobedience, God is still saying that union, that link, that cord is still in place.

Not only so, it's a cord of love. My love has not gone away, he says. My love has not been changed by the tendency of Israel to go after the baals, by their disobedience, by their wandering away from the husband they're married to in the Lord.

[18 : 27] And I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws. And I bent down to them and fed them. When the bullock or the heifer has finished the day's work, the person who cares for it and to whom that is a very valuable animal, is very careful how they take off the yoke off their necks because it's been rubbing on their necks all the day that they've been working.

And they soothe that neck with whatever it is, oil of some kind as far as possible to soothe the chafing marks, the parts of their skin that's become chafed with the work that they've been involved in, where the yoke has cut into the skin.

They massage that carefully. Not only so, but they bent down to them and fed them. They bend down to feed them. They make sure they have enough food at the end of the day to keep up their strength, to keep up their resources.

That's a picture of God. And it's a wonderful picture of God's love which protectively cares. because he's the one who takes the time to mollify by his spirit the wounds of our lives.

Fellow Christians may help. They often do. But even the best of Christians and the best of support, humanly speaking, can never match the quality of the love of God.

[20 : 06] The love of God in Jesus Christ who is touched with the feeling of our infirmities having been tempted in all points like as we are and yet without sin.

Why is that? So that he can be a compassionate and faithful high priest in things concerning God. In other words, in bringing us to God, in representing us before God, in dealing with us personally through his spirit, what does Jesus do?

He's saying to us today, I know your wounds. I know how you're hurting. I know where your hurt is and what its cause is. Let me massage my truth into your wounds.

Allow me to take my truth and apply it to where you're hurting because that's what my love is like. It patiently cares.

Protectively cares. And isn't that what's leaving you here today? That you know that this God bends down to feed us through his word.

[21 : 17] He doesn't stand at a distance and say, it's all right. I know all about you. I'm the sovereign one. I'm the all-seeing one. I'm the omniscient one. I'm the God who sees everything in the world, in the universe, and the whole span of history.

Yes, of course, that's true. But you want a God who's beside you, a God who's in your life. A God who's not going to just assure you that he sees you from a distance, but a God who's saying to you, I am with you.

I've bent down, and I'm bending down daily in the sense in which he comes to regard us and to come alongside us and through his spirit to actually attend to our needs, to our feeding, to our comfort, to our massaging of grace.

how do you feel about that? What's your opinion of that today? How do you relate to that today?

Do you have in your life this comfort, this assurance? the hands of this God, if you like, rubbing his grace into your life, into all the pains, the troubles, the questions, the struggles, the painful providences that come into your life from time to time.

[22 : 39] what is it that's paining you today? What's causing you the most hurt today? What's the heaviness in your heart about if your heart is heavy?

More importantly, what are you going to do with it? Where are you going to take it? Whose love is going to attend to it? Isn't it the love which protectively cares?

A love which powerfully rescues. It's the love which patiently teaches. It's the love which protectively cares. And finally, fourthly, it's the love which punishes restoratively.

Verses 5 right through to 11. Because he's not going to give up on those people of Israel despite the fact that they've gone after these other gods in the Canaanite religion.

He's not going to say, right, I'm going to hand you over and that's it. I'm done with you. Yes, they're going to have hard times and going away from God by his people will always result in hard times to some extent or other.

[23 : 49] Chapter 2, you can see right through to chapter 3 how God is telling them I'm going to take you back to the wilderness in a spiritual sense. He's going to deprive them of the things that they have come to despise and to devalue the means that God has given them by which he has

taught them over the years.

He's going to bring them into exile. Assyria is going to come and take them away into another land until they learn what they have done, until they turn back to the Lord.

My friends, the fact that God's love never forsakes his people, never let that be a reason why you should say, well, it's not all that serious then if I slide away a bit, if I just relax here and there in my spiritual life.

That's not what it's about. In doing that, what we're actually doing is really devaluing this love of God and this love of God is not going to let us go because he describes it in verses 8 and 9 especially in a way that's absolutely incredible.

He is really bringing us to look into his own heart. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? That's the same as Israel. How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Adma?

[25 : 10] How can I treat you like Zeboam? That's what they deserve. Adma and Zeboam were two of the towns on the plain in which Sodom and Gomorrah were located that came to be destroyed in that awful destruction that fell upon these cities for their wickedness.

And God is saying, actually, the way you're acting, Israel, Ephraim, the way you're acting really in a sense deserves that very judgment. And although I'm going to bring upon you difficult times, the sword, as it says in verse 6, and exile, it's for your restoration.

The love which punishes restoratively in order to bring them back to God himself. What he's really saying in verses 8 and 9 is, how can I make you like Adma and treat you like Zeboam?

My heart recoils within me. My compassions grow warm and tender. I will not execute my burning anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

You might think that for all that Israel have done and all the disobedience they have shown, that because God is God, well, that city is just going to come in judgment and he's going to destroy them.

[26 : 35] And what God is saying is, if I were a man, that's what I would do. If I were guided by human impulse only, that's what I would actually carry out.

And it would be no less than Israel deserve. But I am God. And therefore, I will not do that. Because the fact that I am God means my love is not going to give them up.

And my love, even when it punishes, punishes. Restoratively. That's why you find such great chapters in the Bible as Hebrews chapter 12.

I can read the passages now, the time is going, but Hebrews chapter 12 is really a wonderful passage to do with chastisement or chastening. God actually bringing difficulties so as to turn us back to himself.

Remember, difficulties, chastisement, doesn't necessarily mean an awful tragic event in anybody's life. Sometimes people can have tragic events in their lives and it's not chastisement. It's not because they've been disobedient to God.

[27 : 42] God, in the mystery of his sovereign providence, sometimes brings that about. Job was like that. It wasn't because he was sliding away from God. It wasn't because he needed chastisement.

And that's not why God actually came with such a difficult providence to him. But he says here in chapter 12 of Hebrews, My son, you have forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons. My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives.

For it is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.

Besides this, we have an earthly father who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the father of spirits and live? For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them.

[28 : 46] But God disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant. But nevertheless, afterward, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by you.

The devil will try to persuade you. Sometimes maybe even your own heart will try and mislead you by telling you that because there are certain difficulties in your way as a Christian, it means the Lord

can't possibly love you.

Or it means maybe the Lord has left you and his love is no longer directed to you. It's actually the very opposite, isn't it, in Hebrews 12? Because what it says there is that chastisement, correction, discipline is a mark of his love, not a sign of its absence.

It's a mark of his love. And the same is true in Hosea chapter 11. You have it for their restoration. And the restoration is a restoration that God has in view in the final chapter of this great book where he appeals to them to return to the Lord.

And yet where he says in verse 4, Assyria, in verse 4, I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel.

[30 : 15] He shall blossom like the lily. He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon. His roots shall spread out. His beauty shall be like the olive. And his fragrance shall be like Lebanon.

They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow. They shall flourish like the corn. They shall blossom like the vine. Their fame shall be like the wine.

of Lebanon. What a magnificent prospect. The love of God set on punishing restoratively, disciplining us, is set upon us being people who are healed, people who know God's influence like the Jew comes to influence what grows to make us productive, beautiful, fruitful.

love. The quality of God's parental love, a love which powerfully rescues, the love which patiently teaches, the love which protectively cares, and the love which punishes restoratively.

And that quality of love makes its appeal to us today, as you find at the beginning of chapter 14. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

[31 : 43] Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to him, take away all iniquity, accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls or with the calves and vows of our lips.

Here then is God's parental love, just a glimpse into it. Where else today can we find direction, comfort, assurance, salvation, like we find in that love of God?

may he bless his word to us today. We're going to sing now in conclusion, and we're singing from Psalm 106 on page 143 from verse 43 to verse 48.

Psalm 106 verses 43 to 48. The tunis Huddersfield, many times he showed his power by delivering his own, but they set their heart on sinning and rebelled against his throne.

In their sin they chose to stay, and they wasted quite a way. That's Psalm 106 verses 43 to 48.

[33 : 10] Let's stand to sing. many times he showed his power by delivering his own, but they set their heart on sinning and rebelled against his throne.

In their sin they chose to stay, and they wished it quite a way.

But when they appealed for mercy, he took note in heaven above.

He recalled his covenant with them, and relented in his love.

So he made their captors all, pity those they held in thrall.

[34 : 41] Gather us, Lord, from the nations, save us, and your name we'll praise.

Blessed be the God of Israel, may his glory last always.

Let the Lord be praised again, let the people say Amen.

One thing I forgot to intimate, it's not on the intimations, but there will actually be a survey carried out next week by the church of attendances at congregational services, so if you can be prepared for that, please, next Lord's Day, there'll be some forms available and directions will be given at the services next Lord's Day.

It's the same sort of thing that happened about this time last year, the church decided to do it again this year just to get accurate statistical records. And I'll go to the side door here this morning. Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and always.

[36 : 01] Amen. Amen. Amen.