Go and love again

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[0:00] If I can just premise this, Hosea chapter 4 is going to be our reading. And if I can just premise this by saying that one of the main themes of Hosea is to convince God's people today that sin isn't just wrong, it hurts.

It's to remind us that God feels the sorrow of when his people are unfaithful. So sin isn't just wrong, it hurts.
And part of this book deals with the pain of sin rather than just the wrongness of it. In chapter 3, we're going to read from chapter 4, but in chapter 3 God commands Hosea to go and get his wife. Go love her, go bring her back, go redeem her, bring her back into your home. And then in chapter 4, it seems like God is bringing up the past. But when we get into the message, you'll see why this is necessary.
So our reading is going to be taken from verse 7 through to verse 19. Now we hear God's word. It's Hosea 4 verse 7. The more they increase, the more they sinned against me.
[1:18] I will change their glory into shame. They feed on the sin of my people. They are greedy for their iniquity. And it shall be like people, like priests.

I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds. They shall eat but not be satisfied. They shall play the whore but not multiply.
Because they have forsaken the Lord. To cherish whoredom, wine and new wine. Which they take away understanding. Which take away understanding.
My people inquire of a piece of wood. And the walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom has led them astray. And they have left their God to play with the whore.
They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains. And burn offerings on the hills. Under oak, popular, and terabith. Because their shade is good.
[2:14] Therefore you daughters play the whore. And your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore. Nor your brides when they commit adultery. For the men themselves go aside with prostitutes.

And sacrifice with cult prostitutes. And a people without understanding shall come to ruin. Though you play the whore, O Israel. Let not Judah become guilty.
Enter not into Gilgal. Nor go up to Beth-Avon. And swear not as the Lord lives. Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn. Can the Lord now feed them?
Like a lamb in a broad pasture. Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone. When their drink is gone. They give themselves to whoring.
Their rules dearly love shame. As a wind wraps them. It is in its wings. And they shall be ashamed. Because of their sacrifices.
[3:15] Well it doesn't make for easy reading. It makes probably less for easy hearing. And it's even stranger to consider that God is saying this.

About his own people that he brought out of Egypt. But this is what we must address. If we're going to address the whole of God's word. We have to address the whole of God's word. So we'll come back to that after this next hymn.
Thank you. Well if you can have your Bibles open. God's word in front of you at Hosea chapter 4. And as we begin. We begin with this sense of tension. If you remember last week and the week before.
We've heard the desperate situation that Hosea finds himself in. And how his life is really an illustration of what God is going through with his people.
[4:14] God commands Hosea to be with Gomer. And to experience everything that would come through that relationship. And the reason Gomer, Hosea must go through all of that.

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Is so that he can actually come to understand the heart of God. God. This is really important because it's many ways. It's much easier to convince a person of the pain that is caused by the sin. Than it is of the offense that is caused by the sin. In other words you can imagine a mother saying to her child. Or perhaps to her husband. Or someone within her family.
What you have said is really hurt me. Now that there comes across with much greater power. Than what you have said is wrong.
It's an offense. It's true that it is offensive. But the pain is something that we feel. An offense is something that we have to rationale.
[5:21] And so someone can sometimes rationale their way out of an offense. Well that's according to your standard. Not mine. But pain doesn't take any notice of those kind of rationales.

It hurts. If it hurts, it hurts. And what we learn in the book of Hosea. Is that sin hurts God. So stop doing it. Sin hurts each other.
So stop doing it. And if it continues to hurt. Then. And it doesn't hurt when you don't do it. Then stop doing it. It's a fairly simple principle that God is teaching us here.
Learning to live with this tension, however, is the difficult part. We can understand that Christians live with tension. They live with pain. And sorrow. And blessing. But whether or not we actually truly need to come to understand why all these dots are connected.
And how they're connected. I'm not so sure we do all the time. And so the tension is experienced without it ever really being fully understood. I can understand pain much better than I can understand someone's argument.
[6:28] Because it just impacts me immediately. And as I said earlier this evening. That whatever we're dealing with in life, we're always dealing with God.

It's never not the case that we're not dealing with God. Whatever we're going through. Whatever God is doing within our life. Whether we notice it or not. We're always dealing with Him.
Now last time. We saw how important it was for you as God's people. Not to write situations off. Not to write people off. Not to write off marriages.
Not to write off other kinds of relationships. Not to write off people at all. We may look at a situation and go, all hope is gone. We may look at a situation and go, it's dead and it's buried.
But since we belong to a God of resurrection. What right do we have to say that something is dead and buried. And cannot be resurrected. We want to put things as though they've gone.
[7:31] And we belong to a God of resurrection who can raise things from the dead. So we may look at a relationship. We may look at a situation. There's no way that this can be redeemed.

And the whole point of Hosea is, yes it can. It can be redeemed. The trouble with redemption is that it hurts. It hurts a lot.
And what we're going to see is that when you receive back anyone who has sinned against you. In any kind of relationship within the church. But this is mainly focused on God and his people. Somewhere along the line the pain is going to be felt. The cross of course is the best example that we have to point to. Because it is the one that God gives us.
To demonstrate the seriousness of sin. But also the greatness of God's love. That's how we come to understand both pain and love in the same context.
[8:29] The other thing that we get to here in this part of Hosea. Is that in chapter 3 everything looks rosy. Go get your wife. Go redeem her. Go bring her back.

Go love her. Sounds a whole lot easier than it is. And then in chapter 4. You get this list of unfaithfulness and sin.
And you feel like saying to God. And what did you have to bring that up for? I thought we're past all of that. I thought all of that was behind us. What do you have to go and bring that up for?
You've just ruined everything all over again. And so chapter 3 looks like we're on a trajectory upwards. That this is going to be redemption. It's going to be a happy reunion. But now we have to see the place from which Hosea must go and get his wife.
Now we see the place from which God has to go down in to get his people. His people were not like the prodigal at this point running back to the father.
[9:33] They're having their enjoyable ways in the sin that they are practicing. And so God is reaching out.

But he's reaching out into a situation that we must understand clearly. God's not raising it simply to remind us how bad we are. He's raising it in the same way Jesus raises it when he says, Your sins

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are forgiven.
Now when you sit here this evening and hear those words from the mouth of Jesus, Jesus, obviously through a servant, your sins are forgiven. You don't feel bad about your sin.
And the reason you don't is because of the context that your sin is mentioned in. Your sins are forgiven. Jesus isn't going over them. He's telling you that he knows them all and that he is forgiving all of them.
And this is really important. That we understand what it is that we have actually been forgiven for. Because it directly relates to how much then we will love Jesus.
[10:39] The best illustration of this, if we can think about it this way, is the woman who cries at the feet of Jesus. Now we know that we belong to a God who will purify.

We know that God will go get his bride. He will come down. He will redeem her. He will rescue her. He will buy her. He will purify her. He will make her beautiful. That's you, by the way.
And one day you will be in that marriage relationship with God. You will be brought out of your sin and be dressed in the most beautiful clothes that you have ever worn.
Standing before God and everything that was in the past is in the past. It is gone. And here you are in this wonderful place.
But you're not there yet. The place that we're in is that we're in that transition of recognizing that this, we're still being brought out of it.
[11:35] So think of this, like I said, is the woman who cries at the feet of Jesus. It's not absolutely sure why she did it the moment she enters the house. And yet she even lets down her hair and she starts drying the feet of Jesus with her hair.

And Simon the Pharisee, who's the one who invited Jesus to come and have some tea, he had other people there. And out of the mouths of these men, they look at what's happening and say what you'd expect to be said in that kind of culture and perhaps even ours.
That if Jesus knew what kind of woman she was, he would not allow her to touch his feet. But the whole point is that Jesus does know what type of woman she is.
But from the men's point of view, from Simon the Pharisee's, is no, if Jesus knew, he would not allow her to do what she is doing to her. And the lesson's fairly straightforward, but it takes a bit of sifting through the parable.
And it's fairly clear at what Jesus is getting at. That it is possible for some people in this world, up to a point, to think that they have sinned so much, that they have strayed so far, that they have committed so much sin, that they just have too much to be forgiven of.
[13:00] I've just done too much. My sin against God is just too great. And therefore, God could never love a person like me. It's possible for people to think like that.

But of course, when they meet Jesus, like this woman who was that type of person, Jesus then explains the parable by saying, she does what she does because she was forgiven much, so she loves much.
However, the flip side to all of this is that it's possible to live in this world with people who don't think they have much to be forgiven of. Like Simon the Pharisee, they don't think they need God's forgiveness.
Or even if they do admit that they have committed sin, they don't believe that their sin actually requires the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I may have done some things bad, but it doesn't require that.
It doesn't require that kind of redemption. And so both cases, both people in both cases are wrong. The woman who thinks that she has too much to be forgiven of is wrong.
[14:10] And the man who thinks that he doesn't have enough that he needs forgiveness is also wrong. And the reason she expresses her love for Jesus the way that she does is because, as Jesus says, that she has been forgiven much.

In other words, she understands all of her sin. And because she understands the depth of her sin and what it is that it actually hurt the heart of God, if I can put it that way, and brought sorrow to him, that that is then reversed to the plus side.
And she expresses this great love at the feet of Jesus. And so as you read Hosea 3 and Hosea 4, we shouldn't say, what are you bringing that up for?
What we should say is that God is allowing us to see the depths from which he rescues us, the depths from which he redeems us, so that out of this, we then turn to God and express the level of

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love towards him that should really be expressed once we've understood the level of sin that we have committed.
It's not about telling you how bad you are. Rather, it is the necessary ingredient for you to be able to love God truly, properly, to the right measure and faithfulness.
[15:33] This is why the Bible never, ever says that you are a sinner saved by grace. It never reminds you of that. It says you are saved by grace through faith, that you are sons of God.

It's Christians who come up with the phrase, you are a sinner saved by grace. It's Christians who cannot help but drag up the past. God doesn't do that.
His message has this sort of forward momentum. Always away from what was. Doesn't avoid it. But how do we get there? Well, here in Hosea, we have to begin with the decline.
God rescues his people from their decline. He rescues his people from the consequences that are associated with their decline. It is a spiritual decline, and therefore, it is a practical decline.
And what that means is this, that whenever a person strays from God spiritually, there will be practical implications to their spiritual declension. In other words, when David sinned against God, he felt it physically in his body.
[16:43] Psalm 32. My bones are heavy within me. This is having a physical effect on my life. So the idea that we can be one way spiritually and another way practically is they are dots that are not separate.

They are ultimately connected. And what we learn here in Hosea is how sin develops in an unfaithful person.
That what you're really learning is that if you take the path of unfaithfulness, what's going to happen when that sin develops? What will it lead to?
And what will God's response be to that development of sin within your life? It's no surprise that some people can be worse than others. We don't lock everybody up for the same crime because we make a distinction between their crimes.
We understand some things to be far worse than others. But what causes that decline? And what causes that decline within God's people? Well, the cause here in Hosea 4 is that they have joined themselves to idols, verse 17.
[17:53] They've entered into a relationship with something that is not God as if it was God. And it's not immediately apparent how they did it or why they did it.

And here's why. If you asked them if they were worshipping God, they would have said yes. If you asked them, are you a worshipper? They would have said yes.
If you asked them, are you worshipping the God that brought you out of Egypt? They would have said yes. Yes. But then they would have added, or Hosea is adding, but they did it through carved images.
And that's the idolatry. It's not that they don't believe they're worshipping God. But the cause of their idolatry is that they have decided to worship God in their own way.
They're still saying they're worshipping God. They're still saying that they're true worshippers. But they're worshipping God through carved images. And that's the idolatry. It's not that they're worshipping the carved image instead of God.
[18:54] But rather that they're worshipping God through the carved image, which is the idolatry. We get the same thing with the golden calf at the end of Exodus, where Moses comes down after receiving the Ten Commandments.

It's very clear if you read that passage that the people think that they're actually worshipping the God that brought them out of Egypt in the golden calf that they have made. And that's the idolatry. Because they think they're worshipping God. But because they're doing it in their way, they've entered into idolatry. Because they're doing it through another means than the way God has actually chosen.
And so they don't spot their spiritual decline because in their mind they think they're still worshipping God. But practically, bowing down before a piece of wood or a piece of metal as if it were God or it was a mediator to God, they have convinced themselves that they're still worshipping God.
But because it's an act of idolatry, they're declining. And the same thing can happen within the church today. That whenever God's people decide that they're going to worship God their way, rather than the prescribed ways that God has given in his word, it is nothing more than an act of

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idolatry.
[20:16] And it is nothing more than something that will actually lead to your spiritual decline and the decline of the church on the whole. And there is no doubt with any of us who has eyes, which is all of us, spiritual eyes that God has given us, to see that the church on the whole has idolatry in it.

Where people are deciding to do it their own way. And you know, as long as I've stood here for the last over nine years, that I hold to a very simple principle.
And the principle is thoroughly theological. It has been for the history of the church called the regulative principle. Which means that everything that I say and do is regulated by the text.
If I can't demonstrate in the text that this is the direction that we ought to worship God in, and how we ought to do things, then it's very easy to pull me up on it.
Because I've got nothing to point to. I've got nothing to stand on. And this is why you never hear me say, ever, in the last nine and a half years that I've been here, I believe God has told me.
[21:28] Right? Because you know what God has told me, because you have the same Bible that I have. And that's really important, because God, by this way, regulates the worship of himself in the same way for all his people.

And that's absolutely crucial, if God is going to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. So here we have a people who are declining, declining as they think they are worshipping God.
They're worshipping God through carved images, but in their minds and hearts, they think they're bowing down to the one true God. But they're doing it in a way that God never permitted.
Now, since Israel and Hosea is in the northern part of the kingdom, remember, Hosea is the time of the divided kingdom. You have Judah in the south.
You have Israel in the north. And Jeroboam was so afraid that God's people would go down south because of the warmer weather. No, it's not because of the warmer weather.
[22:36] That was a little bit of humor. That they would go down south because that is where the temple was. That was where Jerusalem was.

That was the place where God's worship was known in the temple. And he was so afraid that all of the people in the north, in Israel, would go down there. He built, as you well know, two golden calves.
And he put one at Bethel, and he put one at Gilgal, and he said to the people, this is your God. This is your God who brought you out of Egypt. This is the God of your ancestors.
This is the true God. Which immediately has a problem saying that you have one at Bethel and one at Gilgal. I mean, it should have been fairly obvious. And what did the people do?
Well, as you know, they were in absolute uproar. They left the north and went south to the temple. No, they did no such thing. They stayed where they were, and they bowed down, and they worshipped God through these images.
[23:39] And why did they do that? Because they didn't know any better. They were destroyed, if I can put it this way, which we will get to in Hosea, due to their lack of knowledge, like we find in Amos.

That God's people are destroyed. They enter into a rapid spiritual decline due to their lack of spiritual understanding, due to their lack of understanding concerning the things of God.
Even the very basic commandments of God, they did not retain in their mind, in their heart. They had a memory hole. And one of the ways I like to illustrate this is by using the idea of education in Iran.
If you look at the education system in Iran, none of those children that come through the education system believe in the Holocaust. Not one.
But the reason they don't believe it is because they've never been taught that it happened. So it looks like, on the surface, they're denying it. But actually, if they've never been given the truth, then how can they actually believe the truth?
[24:56] The reason why God's people's sin is so serious here is because they have received the truth, and they have willfully ignored what they have been given as a way of saying, well, this will do.

This will do. We can worship. We can put up with this. We can worship God here. Yeah, it's fine up here in the north. We'll just carry on as we are. So again, if you were to ask them the question, are you worshiping God?

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They would have said yes. If you ask God if his people were worshiping him, he would have said no. They thought they were worshipers, but they were actually declining very, very quickly.
Now, this decline led to a breaking of the covenant. And what this means is that when God loves a person, you, when God loves you, as he does, he loves you, if I can put it this way, covenantally. As a family, we raise our children covenantally because we believe that's what the Bible teaches us to do. That when I love my wife, I must love her covenantally.
[26:07] covenantally. When she loves me, she must love me covenantally because this is the way God is laid it out in his word. What does that mean? It means that when God makes a promise to you, he must love you to the point where he keeps that promise.

He is never allowed to break it. If God has promised you that he has saved you in Christ Jesus and that you are eternally secure, that promise will always be kept because that's what it means to be loved covenantally.
It means that I make a promise to you, I keep that promise to you and I never break that promise to you. But on God's people's side, they did break it.
They lived unfaithfully and you can only be unfaithful, properly understood, within a covenant understanding so that I know what I'm being unfaithful to.
So God says, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt. This is where I stand. This is where you stand. This is how we walk together. And God's people at the beginning, well even at the beginning with the golden calf, were going astray.
[27:18] But they had it very, very clear. And then you'll notice in verse 7 what happened as the people of God increased.

That though they had this knowledge and though they lived in willful ignorance, verse 7 says that the more they increased, the more they sinned against me. Now this, on the surface, looks as if that the more there was of God's people, you know, parents having children, then the more sin there is. And that would be a reasonable understanding. There would be nothing wrong in understanding that. But this is actually taking aim at the ministers. This is where the ministers are sinning against God.
They're not called ministers, they're called priests. And God's priests, the people who are to take the offerings and make the offerings on behalf of God's people, are totally corrupt, totally sinful.
So much so, God says in verse 8 that they feed on the sin of my people. And verse 10, it says, they shall eat, but not be satisfied.
[28:28] I can't really think of an illustration, especially within ministry, I'm finding it very difficult, or I found it very difficult all week, to think of an illustration that can demonstrate how a minister can profit off the sin of his people.

I can understand how sin can lead to profitable companies in the world, how sin can cause certain stocks to go up or down due to how much they can promote money and sex and perhaps a few other things.
I can understand how sin can be a promotional profit there, but in the ministry I find it very difficult. Here, it's not difficult at all, because it was the priest's responsibility to take the offering, a lamb without spot or blemish.
And not only were they to offer this before God as a sin offering, they had to eat it, Leviticus 6, which meant that the more the people sinned, the more offerings they had to make, and the priest fed on the sin of the people.
In other words, it was profitable for them, for the people of God to sin. They had more lamb. They had more to eat. They were having a wonderful time.
[29:51] Wrong, but they were feeding on the sin of the people. It'd be much better to get out of the tent and say, don't say sorry, just don't do it anymore.

But they're not. They're as corrupt as the people. Instead of telling them God's law and God's ways or it should have happened within the community, instead they were feeding off the sin of the people.
They were breaking covenant just like the people of God were breaking covenant. And then the really devastating thing here is the generational influence.
Verse 13 through to 14. They sacrifice on the tops of mountains, burnt offerings in the hills under oak, popular in terabith because their shade is good.

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Therefore your daughters play the whore and your brides commit adultery. Then verse 14. I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore. In other words, what God is saying to his people is this.
[30:59] Your daughters are as bad as you, but I can't punish them because they learnt it from you. In other words, you have a whole generation of children growing up that are as bad as the parents and God says I'm not going to punish the children because even though their sin is wrong, even though it hurts, it's sorrowful, I will not punish them because they learnt it from you.

We must never think that somehow our children's outcome has nothing to do with us. I'm more than willing to take full responsibility for the rest of my life for how my children turn out.
I pray that God never withholds his grace from my children like he did with Adam. I mean, I live with that constant fear and it's a real fear.
It's something that makes me feel really fearful. But that fear motivates me every single day and every single night that God would never withhold his grace from my children.
That I pray as we read last week in Hosea that he surrounds them with a hedge of thorns that any time they decide to stray it hurts so that they would turn back around.
[32:20] God is telling his people you're responsible for the young people within your congregation. You're responsible for your own children. I can't take it out on them because you're to blame.

And that's a serious message one I which I think largely in the church we do not like to acknowledge or remember because of the heavy, heavy responsibility that comes with it.
We all need God's grace. It's got nothing to do with how good a parent we are. It has more to do with how faithful we are to keeping covenant with God. It's all about covenant keeping.
So here's the exhortation as we close. Amongst God's people in the church today just like in Israel back then there can be an avoidance to connecting the dots between the spiritual and the practical. And the reason we don't want to connect the dots is because it might reveal things that we don't want to admit. And one of the dots that get connected is that if this relates to that then I am responsible for it.
[33:35] And so if I can avoid to connect the dots I can at least plead a certain level of ignorance. Even in my willful ignorance I can plead a level of ignorance.

And that's what God's people are doing. This is why it is never satisfactory for God's people to say to God I forgot. You'll notice that when God's people want to use the argument I forgot they're still judged.
This is why a parent knows when their child comes to them and they've been asked to do something which they've not done and they go I forgot as though this is a genius response to absolve myself of any responsibility but what you're forgetting to remember is that your responsibility was to remember.
Your sin in forgetting is a failure to be responsible to remember and that's what God's people have committed. The sin that they have committed in their willful ignorance in their ignorance or in their I forgot is actually the sin of not remembering when they were called to remember.
You think about how much you as a child would have got into trouble far less if you remembered far more. If you only remembered to do what you were asked to do on the time that you were meant to do just imagine how much trouble you would have escaped.
[35:02] It's the same with God's people even today. That that spiritual amnesia caused by idolatry blinds us deafens us and causes us to decline.

On the flip side that even though this is a desperate situation God loves you. God loves this people and he said that he's going to redeem them and bring them back.
This idolatrous people that seem to want nothing to do with their God is going to be loved by God in such a way where they're going to have no choice and in the end turn to him and realize the way that they have been loved.
Just like the woman who comes to Jesus crying at his feet drying them with his hair and the people around them say if they only knew what type of woman she was he would never allow that to happen.
The point is he did know what type of woman she was and he forgave her sins and he actually says that this is the type of woman that is a demonstration to the rest of you sat around here of how you ought to love me but you will think that you haven't sinned as much as her.

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[36:15] You will think you're better than her and we're really not. Well here's the painful part and I almost wanted to leave it out because I knew that I wasn't going to be able to cope with it.

I don't even think I'm going to be able to cope with it now even though I'm going to say it but I have to say it because it's here. I'm going to admit openly that this is going to show my weakness and my hard heart and I'm not going to be able to hide it though I'd like to.
The difficult question that Hosea faces when he's asked to go get his wife back is this one. How do you get a woman back who's now so different from when she left?
Right? She's not the woman she was when she left me. How can I welcome her back after I know everything that she's done? It would have been nice to not have to say this.
To sort of skate over it as though that's what he's been asked to do. I think if God asked me to do that, imagine how difficult that is.
[37:30] And that's what God is doing. God knows what we've been through. He knows what we've given ourselves over. He knows everything and he says, come here. Open up, come here.

You know, on a human level, I just don't understand how that's possible. I mean, by God's grace, of course. But when you find out the truth about a person, the difficulty of teaching yourself not to remember that, that the part of redeeming and welcoming and forgiving her back is to think, no, that's in the past.
And this is easier said than done to love. Very difficult to love, at least to love properly.
And I think the reason is is because we all have lines that if people cross them, there's no way back. And we all have those lines that we will go up to, but we won't cross to go and get them.
You've just gone too far. You've gone too far for me to cross over, and you've gone too far for you to cross back over. It's dead and it's buried.
[38:51] We want to bury it, and here we are being commanded by a God of resurrection. It's not over until God says that it's over.

Hosea, go and get your wife. And the command here is that Hosea is simply an illustration. Let's not get too caught up with Hosea. The real lesson here is the length that God goes to to get us, to redeem us, to bring us back.
God, in Christ Jesus, crosses the lines that we won't cross. He crosses the lines that we've drawn that says, that's too far. And he crosses them and brings us home.
And he allows us to touch his feet, to cry on them, and to dry his feet with their hair. We're the women who don't believe that we can truly be loved in this way.
And here we are redeemed by a God who demonstrates that he loves us in this way. When God commands Hosea to go and get his wife, it's simply an illustration of what God does.
[40:01] And now we see from where he gets us, and how lost we were. Go and love her again. And that's what we have in Christ.

Amen. Amen.

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