

No one loves you like God does * Hosea 11

October 11, 2020 * Thanksgiving * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

When I was younger, one of my favourite bands was a Christian band called Jars of clay. They had this song called "No one loves me like you do." The *song* itself wasn't awesome, but the *sentiment* was: 'No one loves me like you do.' Isn't that incredible? That no one loves us like God does? That's a pretty amazing idea. But you know, I have to admit that sometimes I wondered – is it true? Does God truly love me like no other? I mean, I know all the things I've done and I know all my unlovable qualities; does God really love me that totally and tenderly? Maybe you've had that thought too.

If you have, then this message is for you. Because no one loves you like God does. And that's clear from the passage that we're going to look at today - Hosea, chapter 11. Hosea is one of those books that doesn't get a lot of attention, but when I read these words years ago, they knocked my socks off and I'm excited to share them today. So Hosea 11 – Ezekiel – Daniel – Hosea – that's where it is in your Bible.

Now when Hosea was written, the exile hadn't happened yet. The people were going about their business, living their lives - many of them ignoring God - and so God sends this man Hosea to call them back to Him. (He sent Hosea to Israel specifically). And this passage I think lays out just how loving, how hifi God truly is - and why it makes sense for us to live for Him. This is one of the most powerful expressions of God's love for his people in the whole of the Bible. Let me just read it for you and then we'll go back and unpack it. Listen to the emotion in God's voice.

NIV Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.

3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them.

4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love; I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them.

5 "Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?

6 Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans.

7 My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them.

8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

9 I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.

10 They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.

11 They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes," declares the LORD.

(Hos 11:1-11 NIV).

Isn't that a beautiful picture of God's love for His people? So tender, so compassionate, so emotional.

NIV Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.

At the Exodus, God reaches in and delivers His people. God takes these nobody slaves in Egypt and makes them His own. He makes them His beloved. And yet, verse 2 -

2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images.

You can almost hear the betrayal in God's voice there, can't you? 'I gave them everything and yet they chased after other gods.' I loved them with a tender love and yet they were no better than the guy with his girlfriend checking out the red dress girl.

3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; (like me, with Ben, carrying them along) but they did not realize it was I who healed them. (He probably thought - 'hey, look what I'm doing, all by myself!' and yet I was the one, carrying them along).

4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love... and yet - the more faithful God was, the less faithful they became. Until finally God had enough). Verse 5 anticipates 2 Kings 17, some people fled to Egypt; the rest were taken off to Assyria. All because - verse 7 -

~~5 "Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?~~

~~6 Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans.~~

7 My people are determined to turn from me.

This lo-fi people turned their backs on their hi-fi God. And yet! Look at verse 8.

8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? (Cities that were judged along with Sodom and Gomorrah).ⁱ

Do you hear the emotion in God's voice, the jumble of feeling that He is experiencing? Justice says - 'they spurn my love then out they go' - and yet love says - 'how can I abandon them?' And then 'how can I redeem them?'

Verse 8 (cont'd) - My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused.

Have you ever seen a more moving picture of God's love for His people? God has made a tender, emotional, compassionate commitment to His people. And so He says -

9 I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I [destroy you]. [You will go into Exile to refine you but I will bring a faithful remnant back and settle them in their homes].ⁱⁱ

They rejected God and so Israel did go into exile but God did not destroy them completely. He preserved a faithful remnant and brought that remnant home. God redeemed and restored His rebellious people. That's a hi-fi God.

Now let's just look at that and pull out a handful of thoughts.

1. God loves His people with a tender, steadfast, relentless love. I think that there is no greater picture of God as a loving father or mother than this in Hosea 11.

And yet, 2. These people respond to His love in a very lo-fi way - going after everything but God.

And so, 3. Justice must be done. I mean, imagine bringing a foster child into your home, investing your life and resources into taking care of them, only to find out that they've been stealing your stuff and pawning it off for drug money. You're not going to be immediately predisposed to giving them more stuff. Justice has got to be done.

And yet, 4. God finds a way to do it mercifully. To preserve His people in some way and to give them another chance.

And that's true not just for Israel but for God's people as a whole.

1. God loves each of us with a tender, steadfast, relentless love. He created us, He provides for us every day, He is utterly committed to us -

And yet, 2. We tend to respond to His love in a very lofi way, don't we? – going after everything but God.

And so, 3. Justice must be done. Turning your back on a high fidelity God is a dangerous proposition.

And yet, 4. God found a way to exact justice, mercifully. To redeem us, to give us a second chance. Hosea 11:9 was right – God says there – 'I will not come in wrath' – and indeed that was true.

In the person of Jesus, He came in mercy. In grace. To bear the wrath of God so that we could be forgiven. Matthew quotes Hosea in the Christmas story – 'Out of Egypt I have called my son' – and he did indeed come out of Egypt to restore us to God.

I said earlier there is no greater picture of God's love for His people than Hosea 11; I think that there may be one even greater – and that's the Cross – the son of God laying down His life to rescue me from sin and bring me back to God. To restore me to the steadfast, unflinching, relentless love of God. To make me a beloved child of God.

That's the Hosea 11 of the New Testament. No one loves you like God does.

Do you know that? Do you feel that deeply in your heart? I mean, Hosea 11 is about specifically Israel but it's also true of God's people generally – and I think 1 John 3:1 really captures Hosea 11 in one verse - How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! People loved by God with a love that is steadfast and tender and unrelenting. If you have turned from sin and trusted God then you are more loved than you could ever possibly imagine.

But here's the question – what are you doing with that love? The ancient Israelites took that commitment for granted. They knew how much God loved them and yet they went on doing their own thing, seeking their own desires, putting their own interests first and that landed them in Exile. How about you? How are you responding to God's love?

If God loves us so completely, how can we not love Him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength?

God's tender care calls for faithful love. That's your big idea for today – God's tender care calls for faithful love. Respond to love that with faithfulness in return. Let your life reflect the love of God.

I think that it would be really valuable for you to put 1 John 3:1 into your phone as a daily reminder, every morning, or put it on a sticky note on your bathroom mirror. "How great is the love that the Father has lavished on us, that I am a beloved child of God." Read that every morning to root yourself in your identity as a child of God. And then throughout the day, pause to ask yourself – does my life reflect that?

Are my actions consistent with those of a person who has been loved totally and tenderly by God?
Am I making God the centre of my life or am I crowding Him in around the edges?
Am I pursuing my own agenda or looking for ways to align my life with His?
Am I treating others with the same radical love that God has shown me?

Friends, God loves you more than a faithful parent loves their child. He takes you by the arms and carries you along. Respond to that tender care with faithful love.

BENEDICTION

9. Eph. 3:17-19 - (May) Christ dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

ⁱ 23 The whole land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur--nothing planted, nothing sprouting, no vegetation growing on it. It will be like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in fierce anger. (Deu 29:23 NIV).

ⁱⁱ 9 For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.

10 They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west.

11 They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes," declares the LORD (Hos 11:9-11 NIV).