

God's Sanctifying Love

Hosea 11

Relentless (Book of Hosea)

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Introduction: Open your Bible to Hosea 11. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: "God's Sanctifying Love."

Listen to the words of Francis Chan

"Many Spirit-filled authors have exhausted the thesaurus in order to describe God with the glory He deserves. His perfect holiness, by definition, assures us that our words can't contain Him. Isn't it a comfort to worship a God we cannot exaggerate?"

- **Francis Chan¹**

God's Love Cannot Be Exaggerated!

God's love cannot be exaggerated! You can express it with the highest superlatives, and it will never be described adequately. All eternity will not be sufficient to adequately speak of His everlasting love He has displayed through the bloody death of His Son for you. Oh, how good God is!!

In theology proper, we often speak of the attributes of God. This is one of those chapters in the Bible where we see that an attribute that He demonstrates to us is His love. When we speak of love, it is not worldly love in any way. Worldly love is self-serving. God's love is sacrificial, generous, and indiscriminate. No matter what your objection, Hosea 11 is clear that God is no respecter of persons in demonstrating His love. Israel was the most unlovable, yet YHWH loved him.

Sovereign Love

Beginning with this chapter and continuing to the end, a new emphasis on the sovereign and ultimately triumphant love of God can be found.

In this, the prophecy of Hosea comes full circle and parallels in its structure the story of the marriage on which it is built. The story of the marriage had three phases. There was an initial period of love and happiness. There was the period of Gomer's unfaithfulness in which the course of her life was continually downward. During this phase, Hosea continued to love his wife and provide for her, but her dissolute and promiscuous life led her into increasing poverty and eventually into slavery. The third phase is seen in Hosea's act of redemption in which he purchased his wife in the slave market and thereby made her his forever. He said in that day, "You are to live with me many days; you must not be a prostitute or be intimate with any man,

¹ Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God (David C. Cook; Colorado Springs, 2013 - updated edition), 33.

and I will live with you" (3:3). On the basis of that analysis, we may say that the last four chapters of Hosea correspond to stage three. The love of God has been present all along, but from chapters 4 to 10 the notes of discipline and judgment predominate. Now, although judgment is still present, the emphasis falls on God's prevailing and unquenchable love.

What an amazing love this is! In chapter 11 Hosea writes of the love of God in reference to Israel's past, present, and future. But in each case there are surprises²

I. God's Past love is an **Electing Love**, vs. 1-4

Hosea 11:1-4, “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 2 The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols. 3 Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. 4 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.”

God's Election of Israel

God begins to speak of his father-love for Israel, he reminds the people that they became his, not by birth, but by an adoption based on election. He loved them and called them, and therefore they should love him.³

“When Israel was a child, I loved him...” Israel is Abraham and Sarah’s grandson. He prefigures Christ as God’s “son of promise” just as his father Isaac. Just as God called out Abraham, so He did for Isaac and Jacob (Israel). Not because of anything they did.

The text in Deuteronomy to which these words probably look back is particularly instructive, for they are an explanation (such as it is) of why the Lord chose Israel.

When YHWH says, “When Israel was a child, I loved him,” He is referring to **Deut. 7:7-8**, where we read, “The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

What claim did Israel have on God? None at all! That is what these verses teach. Israel was not more numerous and therefore useful. He was not more moral or devoted. There was nothing in Israel that in any way made his superior or more desirable to God than the other nations round about. So the explanation of God’s electing love is to be found in the love itself and in no other place. He loved them because he loved them. That is all.⁴

Out of Egypt: God's Son Jesus Christ

Who is this one God calls “My Son”? The choice of Israel is ultimately fulfilled through Jesus Christ our Lord.

² Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Minor Prophets: an expositional commentary* (p. 87). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

³Ibid., 88.

⁴ Ibid., 87-88.

Kevin DeYoung says, “Clearly, Hosea, speaking for the Lord, is harkening back to the Exodus. He is remembering when Israel was just a little toddler of a nation and God delivered them out of bondage in Egypt.

But **Matthew 2:15** (quoting Hosea 11) refers to God hiding Jesus away in Egypt to avoid Herod’s decree and then calling him back from Egypt when Herod is dead. How can this possibly be a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy?

Jesus is fulfilling the redemptive historical purposes of the nation. In other words, Jesus is the embodiment of Israel. Jesus is the true Israel. All that is promised in Israel will be fulfilled through Christ.

Matthew wasn’t playing fast and loose with the Scriptures. Actually, he was looking back and he carefully drew analogies between the events of the nation’s history and the historical incidents in the life of Jesus.⁵ Matthew has arranged the material in such a way as to retell Israel’s story, with Jesus now as the true Israel. So just like the Israelites left Egypt and then passed through the Red Sea (baptized into the sea according 1 Cor. 10:2), Jesus too leaves Egypt and passes through the waters in his baptism.⁶

The Pentateuch presents the history of Israel, which is then mirrored in the life of Jesus. So the Sermon on the Mount is like the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai. Jesus is the true Moses, the ultimate law-giver.

So the point of Hosea 11 is that God calls Israel out of Egypt. What a relentless love.

The Shock of the Passage – Relentless Love

The passage before us is remarkable. Though it is of Israel as a whole, the portrayal of God as a Father calling and caring for his son is so tender in its detail that it is hard to imagine anyone (particularly a Jew) reading this and not feeling personally the object of such divine compassion when they deserved divine retribution. God’s love is a crazy, shocking love.

Look at the relentlessness of God’s love in the midst of their rebellion: **vs. 2**, “The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.” The more the prophets called the people to the Lord, the more they went astray.

God’s Love is Personal

God’s love is personal. St. **Augustine** said, “God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us to love.”

God elected you based on His free love. It is not because we chose Him that He loves us. St. Augustine also said, “God chooses us, not because we believe, but that we may believe.”

As **2 Thes. 2:13** says, ‘But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.’ We don’t know why He chose us. Yet He did. Eph. 1:4-6, “he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.”

⁵ *Bibliotheca Sacra* 143:325

⁶ Kevin DeYoung. "Out of Egypt I Called My Son" Blog Article, Dec. 9, 2010, The Gospel Coalition - <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung/2010/12/09/3133/>

God Taught Israel to Walk Out of Egypt

We see again the tender love of God for Israel (and us!) in **verse 3**, “Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk; I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them.”

The metaphor of teaching to walk appears to relate to Israel’s walking out of Egypt.⁷ The picture is of a father teaching his child to walk; one does this by bending over and holding the child’s arms, not by picking up the child. They trusted God, and because of that, they walked right out of Egypt.

God has taught each one of us to walk out of Egypt. We are to have nothing to do with loving the world “or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (**1 John 2:15**).

Cords of Kindness

Again the tender love of God is seen in **verse 4a**, “I led them with cords of kindness [a man-ADAM], with the bands of love...”

The **bands of kindness** or literally “**a man**” are such as those with which men, especially children, would be led, opposed to ropes, with which animals are tied. In this illustration, **gentle treatment** is implied. God treats us like a mother who ties a cord around her child’s arm, so that he or she does not get lost. He never straps us in like an animal.

God Does Not Give Us What We Deserve

Again in **verse 4b**, “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 world straps us in like an animal, even in our suffering, God will open up our jaws like that of an animal so that we may eat conveniently.

God does give us what we deserve. We deserve ropes of condemnation, but God gives us cords of kindness. God throws over us the cords of love even today, when He calls us through the preaching of his Word, gives us his sacraments, promises and supplies us with every good thing, and visits us with precious afflictions: so we would pray that God would draw us further still after Himself.⁸

II. God’s Present love is a **Conforming Love**, vs.5-7

The Bible teaches us in the New Testament book of Romans 8:28-30

Hosea 11:5-7, “5 They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. 6 The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels. 7 My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.”

This next section of the chapter (vv. 5–7) we see that the bliss of Israel’s infant years will now be replaced God’s discipline.⁹ God sends pain and suffering to His beloved people to grow them and conform them to His image.

⁷ Garrett, D. A. (1997). *Hosea, Joel* (Vol. 19A, p. 223). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁸ Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Schmoller, O., & McCurdy, J. F. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Hosea* (p. 88). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

⁹ Ibid., 89.

In the book of Hosea, God does not allow His people to get away with sin. What was true then is true now. **Phil. 1:6**, “I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

God does not leave us in our spiritual sloth. He disciplines us. He sends difficulties. As Paul says in **Romans 8:18**, “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Refused to Turn to Me

Note that it is not merely Israel’s sin that is the problem, but rather the grim fact that she will not repent of it: “they have refused to return to me” (vs. 5). God is ready to forgive. Israel is not ready to repent.

The Whirling Sword

Verse 6-7, “The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels.”

11:6 The opening line of this verse, literally “a sword will whirl about in his cities,” poetically portrays the fury of the Assyrian army as a sword slashing through the cities of Israel.¹⁰ Chastening will come through war and slavery.

The last part of the verse would be better translated, “It will put an end to their own counsels [boastings].”

The truth is, God’s discipline humbles our pride and quiets our tongue. Praise God for the loving discipline of God. The idea that God would allow war or slavery into a believer’s life, seems cruel and unthinkable, but when all is said and done, all things work together for good and conform us into the image of Christ.

What is Your Whirling Sword?

So I have to ask you, what is your whirling sword? What is bringing pain and suffering into your life? You have a choice to trust God and **grow**, or get bitter say **no!** Receive all the pain in your life from the hand of God. His wisdom is best. He is not cruel.

When we look back from heaven upon the worst and cruelest of pains of this life, they will seem like feathers compared to the glory that will follow. We will praise God for the most confusing times of our lives that made us so weak. He uses all these things to humble us and renew our minds into the humility of Christ.

God is Not an Enabler

God goes on to say in **verse 7** that He is not going to cut the discipline short. In other words, God is not an enabler. He will not spoil us. What we may see as cruelty is actually our salvation. He is saving us from ourselves. Hosea explains in verse 7, “My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.”

Miss Claudia Loftis

Have I ever told you about my Spanish teacher? Her name is Miss Claudia Loftis. I thought she was the meanest professor for about two years. She never let up in putting us

¹⁰ Garrett, 226.

through the most difficult tests. She prescribed the most demanding homework. She never gave us a break.

After two years I finally entered into an upper level class – Spanish Literature and Drama. And Miss Loftis was a completely different person. She had to be hard because we were all so undisciplined. I thank God for Miss Loftis' discipline. But I thank the Lord much more for His discipline in my life.

God will not cut the process of sanctification short in our lives. He has a plan, and that plan includes pain. But it results in being transformed! Don't you want a transformed life?

III. Future: God's **Relentless Love**, vs.8-12

God Crying

Tim Keller says: "You get down to 11:8, and suddenly we hear the most amazing noise in the Bible. God crying."¹¹ **Hosea 11:8-9**, "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. **9** 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."

God's Reluctance

God has been comparing himself to a man, a human father. He has spoken of His love and the ingratitude and irony of having Israel go her own way rather than remain with him. It is a striking image, but in the back of our minds we are always thinking that it is, after all, an image and not to be pressed too far. God loves us, yes! But surely not with the full emotions that a human father would have at the rebellion of his son! No? Yet that is what God says in verses 8 and 9. And not only this, he also portrays himself as being inwardly divided—uncertain what to do, vacillating.¹² Can this be God saying: (vs. 8) "How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender" (**Hosea 11:8**).

A God Who Hesitates

We deserve wrath. Israel's sin has brought her to the brink of irrevocable judgment, the very theme that has occupied the center section of the book (chs. 4–10). "Giving them up" and "handing them over" refer to total destruction. Admah and Zeboiim were two of the cities of the plain destroyed when Sodom and Gomorrah were likewise blotted out (cf. Gen. 14:2, 8; 19:19; Deut. 29:23). Their names stand for swift annihilation. But on the brink of such judgment it is God rather than Israel who hesitates. "How can I do it?" he says, as wrath against sin and love for the people do battle within him. At last the answer comes: (vs. 9) "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."

¹¹ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

¹² Boice, 89.

God Never Gives Up on You!

God is not a man. He is not capricious. He is not reckless. He is not a tyrant. He is compassionate.

God will never give up on you. He says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (**Hebrews 13:5**). The author of Hebrews is quoting **Deuteronomy 31:5**, “Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”

The Power of God's Roar!

Hosea 11:10-11, “They shall go after the LORD; he will roar like a lion; when he roars, his children shall come trembling from the west; 11 they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes, declares the LORD.”

For both those who are faithful, and those who are going astray, God has a promise. He will conform them ultimately to “their homes.” He will bring peace.

The Roar that Brings Peace

Here Yahweh takes upon himself the ferocity of the lion, not to destroy Israel but to restore it. The image, like many in the prophets, is disorienting: a lion roars, but birds *come to it* rather than flee.

Hosea’s point here is that there is to be a new exodus in which God will again play the part of the lion and deliver his people from their enemies and into a new Promised Land.¹³ Let me say that the New Promised Land is not fulfilled in the time of Ezra or in the time of King Herod. All the building back of their homes and of the Temple did not restore the peace of God.

His Children from the West

His children come “from the west.” Without trying to stretch this text too far, I am reminded of the words of Jesus – that this is not just referring to ethnic Jews, but also to His people among the Gentiles. We read in **Luke 13:28-30**, “you [will] see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out.”²⁹ And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.³⁰ And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”

Israel and Judah in a Bad State

Hebrews 11:12, “Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit, but Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the Holy One.”

12b could be translated “holy ones” or false deities. If we understand verse 12b correctly, *Judah* is in precisely the same predicament. Her behavior is parallel to Ephraim’s, not sharply different from it.

The key to our interpretation is the meaning of *god* (Heb. ‘ēl) and the *holy ones* (Heb. *qēdōšîm*). According to **DA Hubbard**: “God here probably means El, the high-god of the Canaanites not Yahweh. And the *holy ones* are not a plural of majesty for Yahweh... but the Canaanite pantheon that comprises El’s court. The verse should then read:

¹³ Garrett, D. A. (1997). *Hosea, Joel* (Vol. 19A, p. 229). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Ephraim has surrounded me with lying
and the House of Israel with deceit.
Judah yet roams with El
and keeps faith with the ‘holy ones’ [of El’s court].¹⁴

We Need the Relentless Love of God

In other words, we need the relentless love of God. We can be just as astray as pagans even when we seem faithful. We need God to come after us.

Conclusion

C.S. Lewis writes, “You asked for a loving God: you have one. The great Spirit you so lightly invoked, the ‘lord of terrible aspect’, is present: not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way, not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate, nor the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the consuming fire Himself, the Love that made the worlds, persistent as the artist’s love for his work and despotic as a man’s love for a dog, provident and revered as a father’s love for a child, jealous, inexorable, exacting as love [in marriage].”¹⁵

What a powerful, unrelenting love God has. He will not stop until we are fully sanctified! Hallelujah!

¹⁴ Hubbard, D. A. (1989). *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 24, p. 211). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹⁵ C.S. Lewis. The Complete C. S. Lewis Signature Classics (Chicago: HarperCollins, 2009), 573.