

# Hosea 11:1

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Date: 16 December 2012

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Most poignant and moving moments in the aftermath of the terrible massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, was a statement made by Robbie Parker, the father of one of the victims, six-year-old Emily Parker.

Maybe some of you saw Robbie Parker speak and make a statement in the light of his own terrible loss, and also he made reference to the others who were suffering, and very movingly he made reference also to the family of the killer and expressed his sympathy for them.

But what shone through particularly as he spoke what must have been very difficult words for him to speak was his love, his fatherly love, for his wee girl who had been killed.

Matthew, in his account of the birth of Jesus, points us in the direction of a passage in the Old Testament that describes, also in poignant and moving terms, God's fatherly love for his children.

We can listen to the words that we've read in Matthew chapter 2 to see where it is that Matthew points us in this particular direction. In verse 13 of chapter 2 we read, When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream.

[ 1 : 2 5 ] Get up, he said. Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.

So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt. For he stayed until the death of Herod, and so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, Out of Egypt I called my son.

These words that we've just read, that Matthew points us to, are words taken from the 11th chapter of the prophet Hosea that we've also read this evening.

And what I want to do this evening is spend some time enjoying the beautiful portrait of the Father's love that this chapter, chapter 11 of Hosea paints for us.

A quick mention of the historical context, the time when Hosea penned these words. And it will be brief, a lot briefer than the time we've dedicated to that the last two Sundays, when we thought about Isaiah and Micah and their respective prophecies.

[ 2 : 3 4 ] The period that we're looking at is very similar. We can notice just very briefly there at the beginning of Hosea in chapter 1, we have the time or historical reference clearly set out for us.

The word of the Lord that came to Hosea, son of Beri, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah. We've seen that Isaiah and Micah, they prophesied in the same period.

In Hosea, there's also a reference made to the reign of Jeroboam, who was king in the northern kingdom of Israel.

Jeroboam, son of Joash, king of Israel. So, we're talking the eighth century B.C. that Hosea prophesied in.

The content of the prophecy would suggest that though the message was certainly relevant for both Israel and Judah, that is, for both the northern and the southern kingdoms, it was particularly appropriate in the context of the idolatry and Baal worship that had become so widespread in the northern kingdom of Israel.

[ 3 : 46 ] Now, King Jeroboam, who we notice is mentioned there in chapter 1, is mentioned in 2 Kings chapter 14. Just a brief account of his reign, and one of the things that is said of him in language that we're familiar with of King Jeroboam is that he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and very particularly the manner he not only put up with, but facilitated and was instrumental in promoting Baal worship in Israel.

And that idolatry of Israel fits very clearly into the message of Hosea. Our Hosea message rather clearly is addressed to this very serious covenant breaking on the part of Israel as they bowed down before Baal and abandoned their own God.

Now, the manner in which the unfaithfulness of Israel is portrayed by Hosea, we might say scandalously portrayed by Hosea, is by the picture or the motif of an adulterous wife.

That's the dominant motif as we read through the prophecy. At the very beginning, it is introduced. And the manner in which this is introduced, or the manner in which this is done, is not only by the use of vivid language, speaking of Israel as akin to an adulterous, unfaithful wife.

That language is found, but it's not just the use of language. But we find, quite shockingly, that the sin of Israel is portrayed also by the very experience of the prophet, who was instructed by God, mysteriously for us and difficult for us to understand, but clearly indicated in the book, was instructed by God to take to Himself an adulterous wife.

[ 5 : 52 ] We can just read very briefly there at the beginning of Hosea, in chapter 1 and verse 2, when the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord.

So, he married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. Very difficult for us to understand the lengths, if you wish, to which God went to get across His message of condemnation, of judgment upon Israel for their adultery.

Well, that's the dominant theme, or the dominant picture that is used to portray the unfaithfulness of Israel, the picture of an adulterous, unfaithful wife.

But it's not the only motif that Hosea uses. He also employs the picture of a rebellious son, of an ungrateful, rebellious son.

And that's the picture that is employed in the chapter that we are interested in this evening, in chapter 11. Our focus will not be so much on the ungrateful, rebellious son, but rather on the father who continues to love such a son.

[ 7 : 16 ] Obviously, the picture of an ungrateful son needs to be married with the picture of the father of that son, and that will be our concern this evening. It's really the primary concern of the chapter to portray for us the love of a father for his son, even when this son rebels against him, is ungrateful towards him in so many ways, as we will see as we go through the chapter.

So, the question that we want to pose and answer this evening is this. What do we discover in this chapter, in the 11th chapter of Hosea, what do we discover of the father's love for Israel and by legitimate and necessary extension for the church, for you and me as members of the church of Jesus Christ?

What does this chapter tell us about our father's love? What I want to do is to really skim through the chapter. We want to look at the whole chapter, or certainly through to where we finished our reading in verse 11.

And in order to do that, we will have to resist the temptation of getting into great detail and simply try and present an overview of the chapter, particularly in this light, of what does it teach us concerning the father's love for us?

What kind of love is the love that we find presented and described here? The first thing that I want to suggest is this, that the father's love for us, the father's love for Israel, is a gracious love.

[ 8 : 53 ] A gracious love. Let's begin at the beginning. In verse 1 of Hosea chapter 11, when Israel was a child, I loved him. When Israel was a child, I loved him.

God is, if you wish, reminiscing, remembering his love for Israel as his infant child. And this, of course, begs the question, in what circumstances and in what way did Israel become God's infant child?

God is remembering Israel as an infant child. He's declaring that when Israel was a child, I loved him. But as I say, that leads to the question, well, when did that happen?

When did Israel become God's child? In what circumstances? And that brings us, and the language of Hosea echoes the language of Deuteronomy chapter 7 and verses 7 and 8.

And let's just read the language there that explains to us the circumstances in which Israel became God's infant child. Deuteronomy chapter 7 and verses 7 and 8.

[ 10 : 09 ] There we discover the motivation, if you wish, the reason why Israel became God's infant child. We read there, 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, a king of Egypt.

And it goes on. The genesis of God's love for Israel was not filial affection or parental duty, but grace.

There the explanation in Deuteronomy is very clear. I loved you because I loved you. There wasn't a reason for it other than my own decision to love you.

God chose to love Israel. God chose to adopt Israel as His child. And this is the force of the language used also in Hosea.

[ 11 : 16 ] When Israel was a child, I loved Him. This speaks of love that is free and unconstrained. This is gracious love. This is a gracious love that we find described in this chapter.

And this, of course, is true of God's fatherly love for each and every one of us. It was true not only of His love for Israel, but it is true for us also as members of the spiritual Israel.

That is something that Paul understood very clearly and explains and makes reference to in his letter to the church in Ephesus.

And in chapter 1 from verse 4 we read, or reading from verse 3 would probably be more helpful. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

For He chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love, He predestined us to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ in accordance with His pleasure and will to the praise and glorious grace which He has freely given to us in the one He loves.

[ 12 : 32 ] Very particularly these words in accordance with His pleasure and will. Why did He choose us? Why did He love us? Because He decided to. It was His free, unconstrained choice to do so.

That was so for Israel and it is so for us. And this is the import, this is the emphasis at the very beginning of this chapter. When Israel was a child, I loved Him.

So this fatherly love is a gracious love. But we can move on in this same verse and notice another aspect of this love and we can call it also a saving love because the verse continues, When Israel was a child, I loved Him and out of Egypt I called My Son.

Now these are the words, of course, that Matthew quotes as he presents for us his account of the birth of Jesus. These words of God through the prophet, though, as we've just noted, are identified by Matthew as carrying a prophetic sense that is fulfilled in Jesus, were not originally prophetic in the predictive sense, but simply descriptive of God's redeeming love towards His people, a saving love that found concrete expression in their deliverance from slavery in Egypt.

I would imagine, it's impossible for us to know, but I would imagine that even Hosea, as he penned these words directed by God, this is God speaking through Hosea, and as He delivered these words, Out of Egypt I called My Son for Hosea, it was clear what was being said.

[ 14 : 19 ] This was a description of what God had done in the past. In the past, God had called His people from slavery in Egypt and He had brought them to the Promised Land.

I would imagine that for Hosea it would have been difficult to imagine that there was any further significance to these words. and equally for those who heard them. But in God's plan and providence they did have a further prophetic significance.

But the point really that we're making here is that these words speak of a saving love, a God who saves His people, His people who were found in slavery, in bondage in Egypt, God, out of love for them, intervenes in their situation, raises up a deliverer, and brings them out of captivity.

And that saving love of God for His people has two elements. Well, no doubt it has many elements, but two that we want to just notice this evening. Two elements that are illustrated in the historic event of deliverance from Egypt and also in the life and ministry of Jesus.

And what do I mean by that? Well, really what I'm saying is simply this, that the people of God were saved out of Egypt, they were saved from Egypt, from slavery, but they were also saved for, for the promised land, for the fulfilling of their God-appointed mission to be a blessing to the nations.

[ 15 : 47 ] So, they were saved from their plight, their slavery, their bondage, but they were also saved for a better land and a higher calling to be a blessing to the nations.

And then when we notice the manner in which these words of Hosea are used by Matthew. So, there we can also think of Jesus.

Jesus is the one who is called out of Egypt, but called out of Egypt that He might fulfill His calling to be a blessing to the nations, indeed to be the Savior of the nations of the world.

And indeed, of course, that truth comes down the ages through to us as God's people, as followers of Jesus. We are called out of Egypt, called out of bondage, called out of slavery to sin, but we are also crucially called to our God-appointed mission to bring the good news of the gospel to the nations of the world.

So, this love of God for Israel, this fatherly love is a gracious love, and it is also a saving love. But we can notice also that this fatherly love is a persevering love.

[ 17 : 06 ] Notice what we read there in verse 2, But the more I called Israel, the further they went from Me. They sacrificed to the Baals, and they burned incense to images.

This is the language of persevering love. Every call directed by God was a loving call. Every time God raised up a prophet to call His people back to Himself, to call His people to repentance, it was a loving call.

The call of a father looking to protect and to provide for his child, but the more he called, the less Israel listened. This is what God says.

This was His experience of His child. The more I called Israel, the further they went from Me. It got worse and worse. They paid less and less attention, more and more taking for granted God's goodness and God's love and God's provision.

But God here is presented. He presents Himself as one who is characterized by persevering love. God calls, but Israel acts like a child, perhaps a teenager, an ungrateful, rebellious teenager.

[ 18 : 25 ] Of course, you don't need to be a teenager to be rebellious and ungrateful. You can be younger or you can be older. But the picture here is of this child who maybe when he was an infant listened to the father, obeyed the father, but now he knows better.

She knows better. And so, though the father calls and calls and calls again, what does the child do further and further away? God's loving advances, His fatherly loving advances are rebuffed.

His love is unappreciated. But what does He do? Does He give up on His child? Does He say, well, I've called enough thus far and no more?

No, the language here is of a God who continues to call. But the more He calls, the further Israel wanders. This is God's fatherly, persevering love.

And we would do well to remember that God is a God who does not change. And He continues to love His children. He continues to love us in like fashion. Maybe some of us here can, from personal experience, testify to the truth of this aspect of God's love, His persevering love.

[ 19 : 38 ] We can look back to times when we do it, ignore His call. We didn't want to hear Him. But then, as He continued and continued and continued to call, as He drew us with cords of love, as we'll notice a little further down, so we were brought back, a persevering love.

As we think of this aspect of God's love, the persevering nature of His love, I pose the question, what is the final or most powerful expression of this persevering love?

Well, let's just think about it for a moment. How did God call His child Israel in the Old Testament? By what means did He do so? Well, He did so by means of the prophets.

He would send a prophet to call back His child. Through the prophets, the call was rung out. But then, as we read in the New Testament, when this matter is being discussed, when the prophets were ignored, when the prophets were silenced, or worse, what did God then do in the history of redemption?

Well, we know what He then did. He sent His own Son to call His child in person, as it were. The prophets ignored, the prophets the prophets killed, and so God, He sent His own Son.

[ 21 : 01 ] This is the greatest demonstration of God's persevering love with His rebellious but loved child. So, this is a gracious love that we find portrayed for us, a saving love and a persevering love.

But as we continue reading the chapter, we find God's love presented as a tender love. Verses 3 and 4, It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms, but they did not realize it was I who healed them.

I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. These verses portray the tender, fatherly love of God.

The picture is no longer of a teenager, but it's back to the picture of an infant being taught to walk by his father. And we can so easily picture the scene, whether we be fathers or mothers or brothers or sisters, we can picture the scene of a father standing behind his wee boy and holding his arms up by his hand as the wee one begins to take his first tentative steps.

And the father does so again and again until finally he's able to let go maybe one of the hands to see if the wee boy or the wee girl can take a few steps by themselves.

[ 22 : 24 ] And then he lets go of both hands. And then the wee child tries to walk by themselves. But of course, when he first tries or she first tries, he falls and hurts himself.

But the father's there to make it better. This is the language here of verse 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.

When they fell, I was there to look after them. I was there to apply the salve and the magic cream that would make it all better. See, this is the tender love of a father for his infant child.

And God is presenting this. He is describing himself. He is painting a portrait of himself for us. But of course, the wee boy who is taught to walk by his father, the wee boy becomes a big boy.

And the wee boy is soon able to walk and run by himself and able to walk and run in the direction that he chooses. And he soon forgets who it was that healed him when he used to fall and cry.

[ 23 : 34 ] And so it was with Israel. But the tender, fatherly love of God does not change even though it is forgotten, even though it is unwanted, even though it is unappreciated.

His love remains constant. In verse 4, the picture is a different one, but equally tender. It's the picture of a farmer and his animals. 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. The farmer with his animals, working animals, were beasts of burden that would help him to plow the field or to carry the supplies.

But the language that God uses is of a farmer who treats these animals as pets or even as his own children, who takes the yoke from their neck, who bends down to feed them.

This is a love that is beyond the call of duty. This is tender love, but it's also surprising and extravagant love. That God demonstrate for his child.

[ 24 : 44 ] It's a tender love. But we have to move on and notice how the chapter also presents to us a disciplining love. Verses 5 to 7, Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent?

Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans. My people are determined to turn against me. Even if they call to the Most High, He will by no means exalt them.

The Father will not force His child to return. He calls and He calls and He calls again, but sadly, in the words of God describing His people, My people are determined to turn from Me.

And God will not oblige them. He will, if you wish, respect their choices. And He will allow them to live with the consequences of their choices.

Such consequences will serve the purpose of disciplining the rebellious child. So, even in this, even in the suffering of His people, there is a loving intention.

[ 25 : 54 ] And of course, that remains true for us today. When we foolishly and stubbornly disobey God, then there will be consequences. And having to face and endure the consequences is not evidence that God no longer loves us.

Far from it. It's evidence that He does love us. And so, we have to live with the consequences of our folly and of our sin. Certainly, the temporal consequences of them.

So, here we have a disciplining love. But in verse 8, we have perhaps the most difficult, in a way, to understand language that God Himself uses to describe Himself.

And the way that we might call it, the adjective we might use to describe this aspect of His love that finds expression in verse 8 is what we might call a vulnerable love.

Then in verse 8, how can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Adma? How can I make you like Zeboim? My heart is changed within me.

[ 26 : 59 ] All my compassion is aroused. This is bold language. It's not the language chosen by the prophet. It's not the prophet being bold.

This is God. This is the language of God. God is speaking. And what God is saying is that the prospect of His people's suffering, even though that suffering is just and deserved, is one that stirs in His heart a strong revulsion.

The more God loves, the more painful is the prospect of the one so loved by God suffering. The language, difficult though this is, in terms of its theological implications, the language is of a suffering God.

Now, I'm not going to enter into the implications of that that are complex and difficult, and we must take care in considering. But if we take the language at face value, that surely is the language that we have that God Himself uses.

What then is to be done in the face of impending and deserved destruction? You see, in verses 5 to 7, God is saying, this is the consequence of your rebellion. This is the consequence of your adultery.

[ 28 : 14 ] But then God says, but how can it be? I don't want them to suffer in that way. I don't want to hand them over. They deserve to be handed over, but I don't want to do it. How can I give you up?

How can I treat you as if you were just like Admon, Zeboim, which were cities on the plain that were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah? He's saying, you're not Sodom and Gomorrah. You're my own.

You're my child. I can't treat you in the way that I treated them. What then is to be done? God recognizes that His people are rebellious.

They deserve punishment. But God says, they're mine and I love them. God will not treat them in the same manner as He treated Adma and Zeboim.

Total destruction for Israel, though justified, will not be Israel's fate. God will not abandon them, though He would be in every right to do so.

[ 29 : 14 ] But then, of course, that creates a difficulty. This chapter creates many difficulties for us, beautiful though it is. How can God not abandon those who deserve to be abandoned?

How can God not destroy those who deserve to be destroyed? How can He do so and remain a just and holy God? Well, God chooses not to answer that question in this chapter through the prophets.

The answer is not to be found in God's first Son called out of Egypt, but in God's only begotten Son called out of Egypt, which brings us to the next aspect of His love, a sacrificial love.

You see, we're still struggling with this question, how can God remain holy and just and not destroy those who deserve to be destroyed? And then we think of the one, His own Son He called out of Egypt, and we remember the words of that Son as He hung on the cross, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why have you abandoned me? And here we have the answer to the question. God is able to declare as He does in this chapter, I will not carry out my fierce anger, a holy and just anger, I will not carry it out, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim, though they deserve to be devastated.

[ 30 : 36 ] I will not come in wrath, though it would be equitable to do so. I will not. Why? Because my fierce anger will rest on another. His fierce anger, His wrath would rest on His own Son, Jesus, who He called out of Egypt.

Deliverance for Israel is secured by the death of another, by the sacrificial, atoning death of Jesus. Now, this is not to say that Israel was spared absolutely from the temporal judgment of God, for we know that they did suffer the temporal judgment of God.

But it is to recognize that God did not destroy them as He destroyed Adman, Zeboim. He did not destroy them, that He did preserve a remnant, the very remnant whose deliverance was bought by the blood of Jesus.

So, in this chapter, we have certainly the truth or the reality that has been pointed to of God's sacrificial love.

And finally, and with this we close, the chapter continues describing a triumphant and reconciling love. Notice verses 10 and 11, then they will follow the Lord, He will roar like a lion.

[ 31 : 57 ] When He roars, His children will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes, declares the Lord.

The time of judgment would come to an end. A day was coming, declares Hosea, when the Lord would roar like a lion in triumph and gather His people to Himself.

And that day has come. The lion of the tribe of Judah has come in the person of Jesus. And today, He roars triumphantly as He gathers His people from Egypt and from Assyria, from east and west, from north and south.

This is a triumphant love, a reconciling love that brings His people back to Himself. And so, in this chapter, this chapter that Matthew turns to as he describes the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem and Jesus' early experience as with His family, He fled to Egypt or was taken to Egypt and then called out to fulfill His mission.

This chapter portrays for us God's fatherly love, the love that He continues to hold and bear to His own children, a love that is gracious, a love that is saving, a love that is persevering, a tender love, a disciplining love, yes, even a vulnerable love, a sacrificial love, a triumphant and reconciling love.

[ 33 : 32 ] And so, for those of us who are members of God's family, those of us who can address through faith in Jesus Christ, God, as our Father, then I say to you, behold your God, behold your Father, behold how He loves you.

Let us pray.