

Hosea 11 v 1 -11 + Colossians 3 v 1-12

When I started to consider what sermon to preach this morning I looked through the various passages set for today and the one I chose blew me away.

It's an OT passage from the book of Hosea, one of the Minor Prophets. Not minor because he has not got much to say but simply because it is shorter than some of the other prophets such as Isaiah & Jeremiah who are called Major Prophets.

But anyway as I say it hit me, as I read this passage, just what sort of God we have and this in the OT!

I say this because a comment I often hear from folk is that they don't like the God of the OT. I can see where they are coming from.

More often than not when God is spoken about in the OT he appears '*not very nice*' and that is putting it mildly!

He seems to be up for **smiting** people right left and centre.

He seems to be someone who you cross at your peril.

He does not seem to display any of the attributes we associate with God based on what is said about him in the NT.

There we find a kind and loving Heavenly Father who goes out of his way to look after his people.

So are we dealing here with 2 Gods, the OT version and the NT version?

Well first let me remind you of this verse from **Malachi ch 3 v 6** which says: *"I am the LORD, and I do not change"*.

So the God of the OT is the same God of the NT and if all we do is concentrate on the bits of God which we like, such as the '*Gentle Jesus meek and mild* picture', then we will end up with a distorted view of God.

Yes we don't like to think of him as a nasty God but the overall picture of God contained in the Bible is one of a God who is single minded in his plan to bring mankind back to himself.

Mankind who, down the millennia, have considered that they knew what was the right way to go, and invariably ended up going away from God.

Make no mistake about it. God will move heaven and earth to bring his creation back to himself and if that means getting rid of anything that gets in the way of his plan of salvation, then so be it.

So we see Him resolutely doing this ahead of his folk in the OT to bring them to the Promised Land and establish them as his people;
Whereas in the NT we actually see his plan of action bringing about the salvation of his people through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

There you go, a very quick overview of the Bible in 139 words!

This morning, as I mentioned, we are going to be looking at a passage from the OT book of Hosea which pictures God as being a loving father exasperated by his wayward child almost to the extent of wanting to wash his hands of the child **but** remembering just how much he loves that child.

The reason this reading jumped out at me was twofold.
Firstly I think the picture painted of this Father is something that many of us can identify with and secondly – **Wow what a God we have who loves us in spite of how we treat Him!**

Recently the funeral took place of Drummer Lee Rigby, the soldier who was brutally murdered a few weeks ago outside Woolwich Barracks.
One of the alleged perpetrators of that terrible murder came originally from a devout Christian home.
Prior to his conversion to the Islamic faith and his subsequent radicalisation, he was, according to those who knew him, a fine upstanding young man. A good Christian example.

How his mother must wonder what went wrong. How could her son, who had come from a devout Christian upbringing, end up committing such an atrocity?
Had she done something wrong in the way she brought him up?
Was there something more she should have done?

Perhaps an extreme example of the children of Christian parents who go off the rails, but there are many devout Christian parents who lament the way their children have turned their backs on the faith in which they were brought up and they wonder why. What did they do wrong?

Should they have spent more time praying with them as children?

Should they have spent more time teaching them about Jesus and salvation? Or maybe the parents spent too much time doing 'religious' things with their children. Perhaps they spent too much time involved at church so much so that their children grew up resenting the church.
Who knows?

Our reading from Hosea chapter 11 has a similar ring to it: - **v 1-4:-** *The LORD says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him and called him out of Egypt as my son. **But the more I called to him, the more he turned away from me.** Yet I was the one who taught Israel to walk. I took my people up in my arms, **but they did not acknowledge that I took care of them.** I drew them to me with affection and love. I picked them up and held them to my cheek; I bent down to them and fed them.*

You can almost feel the pain in Gods heart for his people. '*What more could I have done from them?*'

- I called them out of Egypt, from that terrible life they were enduring.
- I looked after them in the dessert for those 40 years.
- I fed them and provided for them and taught them about myself.
- I loved them as much as I possibly could.
- I could not do anything more for them – AND YET,

v 2: *But the more I called to him, the more he turned away from me. My people sacrificed to Baal; they burned incense to idols.*

v 3: *but they did not acknowledge that I took care of them.*

v 5: *"They refuse to return to me.*

Can you hear the pain in Gods heart for his wayward people?

People whom he has poured out his love on, and they respond by turning their backs on him.

God is mightily grieved by the response of his people just as I am sure there are many of us here today who are grieved by the actions of our off-spring.

And yet we still continue to love them.

They are still our flesh and blood and although they have hurt us, in some cases greatly, we still love them.

I am sure that the mother of the killer of the soldier will still love her son in spite of what he has become.

So what happens next?

Ah here we are with the OT God again. This just proves that he is not a loving God. Just look what happens to the people who have consistently turned their backs on him **v 5-7**: *“They refuse to return to me, and so they must return to Egypt and Assyria will rule them. War will sweep through their cities and break down the city gates. It will destroy my people... They insist on turning away from me. They will cry out because of the yoke that is on them, but no one will lift it from them.*

That ‘proves’ that God only loves you if you love him back.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

This chapter so far, has pictured a God who has ‘struggled’ with a rebellious child, Israel, and no matter what he has done for them they have preferred to turn their backs on him.

This has not been a one off action; it has been on-going for thousands of years.

Rebellion has consequences.

How do we react with a rebellious child?

Loss of privileges: no computer, TV, not going out with friends.

Now if they apologise and actually change their ways - we are likely to relent.

But what would happen if this rebellion was on-going, permanent, with no apparent attitude of change, not even willing to try?

How would we react? By letting them off all the time?

Is that the act of a responsible parent?

What type of child would that off-spring become if they were consistently disobedient and kept being let off?

No there has to come a time of justice even though there is love as well.

God has been struggling with this wayward child, Israel.

They have consistently turned away from him even though he has done more than enough to help and support them.

So tempered with love there has to be justice.

That is what we are seeing in these verses and it is a prophecy of what would actually happen to the people of Israel.

The question that keeps nagging in my mind as I read these words in Hosea is WHY?

Why, in spite of all that God has done for his people do they continue to turn their backs on him.

I think we get an answer to our question, but it is buried and easily overlooked.

In the portion of the reading I just quoted, about: *Egypt and Assyria will rule them. War will sweep through their cities and break down the city gates*, I cut out a short sentence, short, but containing the crucial answer to our question – WHY. Why do they continue to turn their backs on God? : - **v 6b** - *because they do what they themselves think best.*

Isn't that the crux of the problem of why we turn our backs on God?

We do what we think is best.

We have a user manual which is the Bible.

However we ignore most of it because it is too hard to understand; it appears to be irrelevant to life today and so on.

So each of us do our own thing.

Each of us do what we think best – and sadly there will be negative results of us turning our backs on God.

Christians are not immune from this doing what they think is best.

Our reading from Colossians highlighted this.

Paul was writing to the new Christians in that church and says this **Colossians 3 v 5-9**: *You must put to death, then, the earthly desires at work in you, such as sexual immorality, indecency, lust, evil passions, and greed (for greed is a form of idolatry). Because of such things God's anger will come upon those who do not obey him. At one time you yourselves used to live according to such desires, when your life was dominated by them. But now you must get rid of all these things: anger, passion, and hateful feelings. No insults or obscene talk must ever come from your lips. Do not lie to one another, for you have put off the old self with its habits.*

Of course we have turned our backs on those things – until, well we know best.

- *“That person needed a good slugging off”.*
- *“I had a right to be angry with that so and so – after what they did to me; and so on”.*

Doesn't this happen time and time again in our lives?

God just seems to get in the way of what we want to do and so we do our own thing.

I wonder if God gets exasperated with us and the way we lead our lives?

Is He trying to warn us, ring our alarm bells - and if He were – would we be interested in listening, or would we adopt a head in the sand attitude – we know best – just like the people of Israel did – and maybe suffering the consequences.

BUT and it is important that we hear this – **God has not given up on you.**

Whilst you may be living well outside Gods will for your life;
Whilst you may prefer to do your own thing and don't give God much thought – He has not given up on you, just as he did not give up on his wayward children of Israel.

Hosea 11 v 8-9 - *“How can I give you up, Israel? How can I abandon you? Could I ever destroy you as I did Admah, or treat you as I did Zeboim? **My heart will not let me do it! My love for you is too strong. I will not punish you in my anger; I will not destroy Israel again.**”*

Yes there will be justice BUT God's heart will not let him forget his love for his people.

However when it comes to our dealings with God, we can sometimes view Him quite cynically.
When we read verses like these in Hosea about a God who loves us inspite of our rejection of him, it seems to be too good to be true.
Life is not like that we say.

It's sad that we feel this way although perhaps not that surprising. After all, life, NOT God, teaches us that generally speaking, rejection cannot be met with love.

So can it really be true that God continues to love us in spite of us continually turning our backs on him?

v 9b of our reading simply says this: *For I am God and not a mere human being. I, the Holy One, am with you. I will not come to you in anger.*

God is not human and does not operate in the way we humans expect him to operate.

He can and does love us, in spite of the way we treat Him.

And whilst it does not add up to our human way of thinking, nonetheless it is a fact stated clearly in God's word.

We are simply called upon to believe and accept Gods love for us.

God is all about mending the broken relationship between us, his creation and him, our creator.

Our reading from Colossians started with the following words:-

You have been raised to life with Christ, so set your hearts on the things that are in heaven, where Christ sits on his throne at the right side of God. Keep your minds fixed on things there, not on things here on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Your real life is Christ and when he appears, then you too will appear with him and share his glory!

Wouldn't it be great if we could keep our focus on Him rather than on anything BUT Him?

I wonder just how much we are losing out because we think we know best.

This sermon was not meant to bore you and if it has I apologise.

But more than anything else I hope you have managed to glean that the God of the OT has you in the palm of his hand and loves you so very much that he does not want to lose you.

He wants you to be able to respond to his love and not keep going off and doing your own thing.

He wants you to be able to experience the life which he has planned for you from the beginning of time.

If you continue to turn from him, he will not turn from you but is willing each and every one of us, no matter where we currently stand in our relationship with Him to turn to him in worship, praise, adoration and thankfulness – because he truly is an amazing and loving Heavenly Father.

v 10-11: *“My people will follow me when I roar like a lion at their enemies. They will hurry to me from the west. They will come from Egypt, as swiftly as birds, and from Assyria, like doves. I will bring them to their homes again. I, the LORD, have spoken.”*

AMEN