

## Hosea 11

Christ Church Liverpool, 9<sup>th</sup> March 2008

### Introduction

I've got 3 headings to help us work our way through and they should come up behind me as we go...

The jilted love of God, The inhuman love of God and The alluring love of God

### The jilted love of God – 11:1-7

In v1-9 you get what is almost an internal conversation in the heart of God as he talks to himself about his love for his people over and against their wickedness.

Firstly he looks back to the Exodus to when he called them out of Egypt and how in the desert he taught them to walk – to be an independent nation for the first time.

How in v4 he bent down to feed them – which is presumably a reference to the feeding with manna in the desert.

But that despite his love for his people they are a faithless bunch who turn their back on their Father. The more he calls the further they run in v1 turning to Baals instead of their God.

So in v3 they are ignorant of the fact that it was God who taught them to walk or who led them through the desert.

And in v5 they refuse to return to God despite his warnings.

In v7 we have a good little summary READ.

They are like the supermarket trolley which just won't go in the direction that you want it to go – they are bent on rejecting God and keep turning away.

You see in this internal conversation in the heart of God, he doesn't have rose tinted spectacles over the state of his people.

He's not the doting parent who's blind to the faults of his child.

God knows what his people are like.

And so he judges them and disciplines them.

He says that he will make Assyria their King. The local superpower will take them over. And God won't listen to them any longer.

And this is no half hearted mealy mouthed judgement either.

Look at v6 READ

It's going to be a savage judgement – people will die and cities will be destroyed.

God is angry with these people. And is right to be that angry.

God knows and sees what's going on.

But against that backdrop there's a startling change of image here in chapter 11 over and against the rest of the book.

In the rest of the book really the image of God is as a jilted husband with a faithless wife – and that's what Hosea's life has become a parable of as Gomer has worked as a prostitute.

But here the image is a bit different

Here the image is not of a loving husband spurned by his adulterous wife but of a generous father spurned by a wicked child.

A father who has done everything he should and could for his child but they have persistently rejected him.

Here when we think of the people's rebellion and God's judgement the picture in our minds is not so much of the beloved wife who left her husband to become a prostitute.

But rather the lovingly cared for child who rebels against his parents and becomes a thorn in their side.

And that picture is no less wounding than the first is it?

I was speaking only the other week to a parent who'd been called into school to see the head after their child had been caught bullying another, in what turned out not to be a bad day but a persistent pattern of behaviour.

What can have gone wrong – they loved the child, cared for the child, but all the same they've turned out a bully.

It's heart breaking.

And that's how God feels about Israel here.

Only more so – because he's the perfect parent.

Which – as a total incidental aside for those of you with children - is one reason why no matter how good you are you can't guarantee the way your kids will turn out – so some of your most important parenting is done on your knees in prayer!

Anyway looking back at Hosea 11 you can see that this rebellious child has 2 faces, two different ways of provoking his father anger...

The first image is the image of **running away from a parent...**

You get that in v2 where God calls to his people but they go further and further running to other gods and not to the true God and then again in v5 where they refuse to return to God, or repent as the NIV puts it.

We've all seen children like this in action. The parents are calmly walking through Tesco's when all of a sudden their 3 year old makes a run for it.

The parents stand their and shout but it makes no difference. Little Jonny is off – and despite the laws of physics his little legs seem to carry him faster than his 30 something frazzled mother can run and he's gone.

Homing in like an exorcet missile on the sweetie isle to wreak some havoc!

But this would have been a startling image for the Israelites...

You see I think the average Israelite – had you challenged him on his nationality or his cultural heritage – would have told you that he was one of God's chosen people – that the Exodus was the defining

moment in his national history. That the 10 Commandments were God's words to the people and that Abraham was his home boy – or whatever their equivalent of home boy was!

The fact that he indulged in a bit of Baal worship was a necessary evil – like paying your taxes – you have to worship Baal – they thought – in order to be confident that your crops wouldn't fail and that your wife would get pregnant when you slept with her.

It's just what you have to do to get by – which is why everyone does it.

But God tells them that worshipping Baal like that IS running from him.

That bit of Baal worship on the side is actually a sign that their hearts are legging it from God like a crazed toddler in Tesco's!

And this the tendency of my heart too isn't it?

To think that God might define my cultural heritage – I'm down as a Christian on Facebook – my friends down the street know that I go to church – but that for all the other important things in life I have to go elsewhere – just like everyone else does.

So my self worth I seek to gain from other peoples praise.

My financial security I seek in my ability to work hard and invest wisely.

My fulfilment in life is found in my children and my wife and in making them happy.

It's not that self worth, financial security or fulfilment are wrong things – they're not – they're gifts that come from God – it's just that in seeking those things outside of God I AM BY DEFINITION running away from him.

So that in the image of Hosea 11 – while I think I'm the obedient child holding onto the side of the pushchair I'm really the one legging it, out of control and progressively getting further and further and further from God.

The second face of this wayward child is **a child who makes their plans regardless of their parents.**

v3 & v6

So in v3 the Israelites (called Ephraim here) carry on life – ignorant of the fact that it is God's plans and God's actions working out and securing their future.

Then v6 – which I think is a little more difficult to see in the NIV God says he will judge them and destroy their cities BECAUSE of their plans. So yes the judgement will put an end to their plans but more than that in the original the judgement comes BECAUSE of their plans.

You see Israel at the time of Hosea are under great national threat.

The Assyrian army are progressively working their way across the region putting to the sword all the other nations and city states in their way.

And Israel look at that and think – rightly – we need to be ready – we need to plan!

So their cities and palaces are awash with the great and the good coming up with plans – and what are their plans?

Well look down at 12:1

They try to make strategic alliances with Assyria to stave off their conquest and try to court the other local superpower Egypt by sending olive oil as a present!

Humanly speaking it's not a bad plan... everyone knows that superpowers are always suckers for oil!

But the big problem is that they're looking for national security not in God who established their nation – but in making plans with other nations.

It's an amazing image. Because the Assyrians are being used by God to discipline the people and turn them back to him – but instead of turning back to God they try to worm their way out.

They don't turn back to God but plan to avoid the discipline.

Imagine – and for some of you this won't be too difficult. A child over the knee of his parents with the hand raised about to smack the bottom.

A good course of action at this point would be saying sorry to your Mum or Dad.

But this child is having none of that and instead tries to talk to the hand to negotiate terms and bribe his little brother into helping out.

You feel like screaming to the child...

Forget the hand child – turn to the one wielding it!

Well again we can be like that too can't we?

That as a church we presume that our security and our long term future depend in the efforts of our own hands and not in God's goodness.

That things sent by God to drive us back to him just leave us floundering around looking for somewhere to place our hope.

So maybe when money is tight we look for our security in the bank balances of rich members or the skills of certain leaders but not in God who has promised to build our church.

Oh God might use the bank balances of rich members and the skills of leaders – but our confidence and plans should be based on God's goodness and no-where else.

It's worth us bearing in mind as we plan to church plant, recruit an assistant pastor and get the church office up and running – that any even all of these could go belly up – we're praying that they won't but they might.

This time in 2010 the church planting team could be still sat in Christ Church.

And if they're not – it's only because God has been good and kind to us and established a church in Aigburth.

Or maybe as individuals when things sent into our lives to drive us

back to God – even difficult things like sickness, unemployment, relationship difficulties or whatever - just push us further away as we seek solace in places other than God – well when that happens we show ourselves to be these wayward kids.

And really we should forget the hand and turn to the one wielding it.

But chapter 11 doesn't end there.

In fact the tone of chapter 11 is much more positive than that and what we've looked at is just there to set up this next part.

So let's move on and consider the...

**The inhuman love of God 11:8-9**

One of the surprising things about parenting – and sorry for the mass of parenting illustrations this morning – that's really only because that's the image of the passage!

Anyway – one of the surprising things about parenting is just how difficult it is to tell your children off properly.

On the one hand there's their stubborn rebelliousness which needs to be dealt with...

A friend of mine's 7 year old boy had been particularly naughty one Sunday afternoon so was sent to his room by his parents with the instructions...

“Go to your room – and don't slam the door on your way in or you'll be in even more trouble than you already are”

So the boy went up to his room and – guess what – slammed the door – then opened it and slammed it again – then opened it and slammed it again – just to make sure the message got through!

And that kind of rebellion – which is common to all children as far as I can tell – needs to be corrected.

But then – on the other hand – it's difficult – because you look at the child and it's your child.

Your flesh and blood and you love them. And you don't want to make them cry but because you love them you want them to behave as well.

And so when you discipline a child it's always with this kind of churned up heart that knows it's the right thing to do but doesn't really want to cause the pain.

And in some ways that's the image of God here in v8-9

Faced with the rebellion of his child God knows he has to judge and punish, and promises to do that, but in doing that his heart is churned up.

Look at v8 READ He can't destroy them like Admah and Zeboiim – the town destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah.

It's not so much that his heart is changed as in he's changing his mind but rather that his heart is churned up over the whole thing.

His heart recoils at the thought of destroying them.

He is heartbroken at the prospect of judging his child.

And how can that be?

Surely he is so angry that he wants to destroy Israel. After all they've treated him despicably.

Well his reason is in v9 READ.

Because he is God and not a man – the Holy One among you, I will not come in wrath.

God's love and God's justice are both inhuman.

It is inhuman anger and love because his anger is not the irate anger of an out of control parent but the loving anger of a holy God who is implacably opposed to evil yet passionately committed to his people.

God in his inhuman holy love, loves the wayward wicked child.

Or in the image of the rest of the book...

God inhumanly loves the prostitute.

I don't know about you but I think most of the time I believe that my sinfulness undermines God's love for me.

I look at my life, the mixed motives with which I do even good things.

I see how much my confidence is shaken when certain things are taken away and realise that I wasn't really trusting God even when I thought I was.

And I look at myself like that and think.

God really can't love me like this can he?

And somewhere in my head I've got this phrase that God hates sin but loves sinners, so to gain assurance I kind of pretend that my sin is an out of body experience that's nothing to do with me.

But v9 tells me that that's rubbish. God has an inhuman love for me. A love which loves rebellious kids like me. A love which loves me while I am still a sinner.

And by trying to downplay my wickedness to be more confident that God loves me I'm actually undermining one of the characteristics of God's love.

Because it's me **with** my wickedness that God's loves – because it is in the character of God to love rebellious children.

It's not that God isn't opposed to my wickedness – that he won't judge it – he is and he will – but he loves me not despite it but with it – and because this is a holy and an inhuman love his love will both judge my wickedness and rid me of it.

And how that works is seen in these final couple of verses in the chapter...

**The alluring love of God – 11:10-11**

If you're married or going out with someone I don't know if you can remember what it was that first attracted you to your partner.

Or if you're single what the things are that you're looking for in a husband or wife...

Maybe it was their good looks and charming personality, their snappy dress sense and crazy sense of humour. Perhaps it was their godliness and regular prayer life – those are good things to be attracted to.

Maybe if you're like Vanessa it was more resignation than anything else.

Well in v10-11 we get a view of what will attract us to God. What will God use to draw his people back – to draw us to him.

And the answer is quite a surprising one. Because the image is not of a Father Christmas type God who pretends that you've never done anything wrong and gives you a present anyway.

Rather the image is of God roaring like a lion and his children coming back trembling to their homes.

Look at v10 READ

And the image of God as the lion appears a few times in Hosea.

Look with me at... 5:14 READ 13:8 READ

You see the image of a Lion is the image of God coming in judgement.

So in 11:10 we have an angry God roaring in judgement. But strangely as the judgement comes instead of being driven away God's people are allured back to him.

Doing the opposite of what they were doing in v2.

The lion roars in judgement and the people come home.

Do you see Hosea's point?

There is a day in the future when God will come in judgement on his people but on that day his judgement will not drive the people away but rather draw them back in fear and awe. Draw them back to love God and to live for him in homes in God's promised land.

And here Hosea was looking forward to that event.

But we look back at it don't we?

You see Hosea 11:1 is quoted in Matthew 2:15 as being God calling Jesus out of Egypt where he'd fled to with his parents to avoid Herod's killing of all the baby boys.

And so when we get to v10 and see the lion roaring in judgement on the people and bringing them salvation.

You realise that God's people are not the OT Israelites any more but rather Jesus.

That it is in Jesus that God is taking the judgement of the wayward child to bring them salvation through the cross.

So that the problem at the heart of God which is described for us in v8 – the heart which is in turmoil because it is lovingly just and justly loving - is answered at the cross.

You see how can God be both holy and loving, merciful and just?

Well by coming himself in the person of his Son and taking the

judgement on himself to save us.

So the God who loves wayward children, judges and transforms those wayward children at the cross.

Listen to how Paul puts it in Romans 5:7-8

“Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”

And that is how God allures us back to him.

By judging and saving at the cross.

I don't know about you but for me often I lose my passion as a Christian.

I was talking to one of the Dads at the school gate this week about how we basically live on the edge of exhaustion running round after children and trying to hold down busy jobs.

And that's not to mention the struggle with sin – that I still display the characteristics of that wayward child in v1-7.

And at times like that what is it that's going to win me back to live for Jesus?

Well it's not down playing my waywardness. It's not pretending that really I'm a pretty good Christian after all who doesn't need to worry.

Nor is it turning to other things to deal with my issues.

Because God loves wayward children – that's not the problem.

The problem is that I've forgotten the cross.

And that's where I need to come back to.

To see there that God loves wayward children enough to send his son to transform me.

And that as the lion roars in judgement – I come trembling home to God, to live for him while we wait for our home in God's promised place.

For some of you this morning you're maybe not a Christian and you kind of wonder what all this is about.

Well really this is the heart of the Christian message – this is Christianity 101. What you need to know.

That God is a god who loves people like you – people who despite being made by God and for God run away from him.

And he longs for you to come back.

And to win you back he's come himself in the person of the Son to die in your place and rescue from his own just judgement as a Father who loves you.

And all you need to do is be drawn back and put your confidence not in your goodness or your niceness or your intelligence – but in God who loves wayward kids like you.

PRAY.