

Out of Egypt I Called My Son: Hosea 8-11
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We're near the end of this sermon series through Hosea, one of the Minor Prophets in the Old Testament. It's good to study the prophets, because the prophets speak very clearly and forthrightly against sin. The prophets exhort God's people to repent of sin and return to God and pursue holiness. We need to hear these things.

This morning we're going to cover chapters 8-11 of Hosea. Like last week, as well as next week, we're covering a large section. My hope is to see some of the big picture themes here and understand how these things affect us today. First, we'll look at misguided worship. Second, God calls His Son. And third, God's tender compassion.

Misguided Worship

I want us to see how Israel's worship was misguided. Then I want to make a couple of observations about misguided worship in the church in our culture today and also apply it to us personally.

In these chapters the rebukes for sin continue. There are threats of judgment. There are expressions of God's anger and hatred of His people's sin. And we have some description of what characterized Israel's sin.

8:1-4

Do you see how their words contradict their actions? They have transgressed the covenant. They have rebelled against God's law. They have spurned the good. But what do they say? They say, "My God, we—Israel—know you." What an appalling contradiction in God's eyes! What blatant hypocrisy. They pretend to worship God, but they have turned to idols.

In addition to this, they have set up leaders for themselves without God's blessing. This is what verse 4 is saying. They have not earnestly prayed to God for leaders, but rather have chosen for themselves kings and princes who are pleasing in their own sight.

They will be punished for their idolatry. Verse 7 says, "For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." In other words, by sowing unrighteousness, they will reap judgment. They are living in rebellion against God, and it will come back to destroy them. The foolishness of their actions is seen in verse 9, where it says "they have gone up to Assyria." They have tried to gain the favor of the surrounding nations. These are the other lovers they have gone after. But it was Assyria who would shortly come and overtake them. This, again, is the story that Gomer personified in her adultery and prostitution. She left Hosea to sell

herself to other men, and ended up in slavery. Similarly, Israel was selling herself to the nations and to their false gods, only to wind up enslaved by them.

10:1-2

This reveals another aspect of their rebellion. They have been relatively prosperous in ways. They are described here as a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. But what have they used their prosperity for? As the country improved materially and financially, what have they done? They have built more and more altars and pillars. These are the structures they would have used in Baal worship. As they had more resources, more profit, more opportunities to plan and build and spend and invest, what did they do? They used their excess in the service, not of God, but of idols. And they may have tried to justify this as true worship, but it was misguided at its core. They said they knew God, but it was not so. Their so-called worship would be judged and demolished by God, as verse 2 says.

The point in all of this is to plead for repentance. We see another call for repentance in 10:12, "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you." Instead of sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind, sow righteousness and reap righteousness. Repent of your idolatry and receive God's blessing.

Now I want to mention a couple of things I've observed recently about the church in our culture. As we think about the various things that bear the name Christian, we realize that there is the need for widespread repentance. There are many different ways that we see misguided worship in churches throughout our culture and around the world. I hope that by mentioning a couple of specifics we can think more concretely about the need for widespread repentance in the church today.

A couple weeks ago I received an interesting letter in the mail. Maybe you've received a similar letter at some point. I didn't request this letter. It just showed up in our mailbox. It contained a prayer rug, which was just a simple piece of paper with a picture of Jesus' face on it. There were other papers with very detailed directions about how to use this prayer rug. In the picture, Jesus' eyes are closed, but the letter says that if you look at it long enough, His eyes will open as a sign that He sees your needs. You are to kneel on this prayer rug, or at least place it on your knees, as you pray for the needs in your life. Then you are to place the rug under your side of the bed that night, and you have to be sure to mail it back on the following day with a list of your prayer requests. And, of course, you're encouraged to send in some "seed money" with it. There were testimonials of people who had

received thousands of dollars in response to these requests, or who had been miraculously healed, or had seen loved ones saved, or had gotten a new house or a new car.

This kind of superstition reminds me very much of Israel's Baal worship. They set up their altars and their pillars. They did many different things in the service of those idols, always hoping for material prosperity.

It is very sad that letters like this go out to folks all over this country, and this kind of message is communicated around the world. I remember when I was in Liberia last year (one of the poorest countries in the world), and hearing that the health and wealth message is wildly popular there. It grieves my heart to see the poorest of the poor being taken advantage of by prosperity preachers.

These kinds of organizations gain such a following because they appeal to our most-worshipped idols. "Do you want more money? Do you want to be healthy? Do you want more material possessions? Do you want to be happier, less anxious, more peaceful? Do you want to have better self-esteem? Well, then, follow these directions, send in some 'seed money' to our ministry, and you'll soon be one of our next success stories."

Then, last Saturday, I was on my way to pick up a pizza that we had ordered that night, and I was listening to *All Things Considered* on National Public Radio. And my ears perked up when they said they were going to do a religion piece. And I became even more interested when Guy Raz introduced who he was going to be interviewing. Here's what he said, "Joel Osteen is one of the most influential religious figures in the world. His Sunday sermon at Lakewood Church in Houston is beamed to more than 10 million households in America and is seen in 100 countries around the world. Part of what makes Joel Osteen so popular is his message, but probably more importantly his style. There is no fire and brimstone, not even a whole lot of scripture, almost no talk of sin and definitely no politics. Joel Osteen is at the vanguard of what's come to be known as motivational preaching. And for that reason, he's easy to like."

That introduction caught my attention because this interview was not only going to reveal some things about what Joel Osteen believes, but it was also going to reveal a great deal about what millions of so-called Christians believe. So I was interested not merely in this individual, but in what his message reflects about the visible church in our day since he has such a massive following. Guy Raz asked some insightful questions. He asked Joel Osteen why he doesn't talk much about sin and why he doesn't take a stand on issues like gay marriage or abortion. Osteen responded that he feels called to a broad audience, and

talking about those kinds of things would be divisive. He feels called simply to encourage people, and he doesn't want to alienate any segment of the population by taking a position on controversial issues like that.

There was also another question that I found really interesting—Raz asked, “Do you think both of the candidates running for president - President Obama and his eventual challenger, Mitt Romney - do you think both of them are Christians?” And Osteen responded, [and I'm quoting here from the transcript I found online] “I do think they are. Mitt Romney, of course, is a Mormon, and some people debate whether or not that's Christian. But when somebody believes that Jesus is the son of God and raised from the dead and believes he's their savior, to me, that's good for me. And, of course, I've heard President Obama. I've been with him in the Easter fellowships where he talks about his faith. So I do believe they both know the Lord.”

Now, there could be a lot of things to talk about there. Let me just say a couple things, hopefully without getting totally sidetracked. First of all, [and this is a side-point – not the main point I'm trying to drive at] I think we need to clarify that the question of a person's religion should not be the ultimate factor in who we vote for. In other words, we should not feel constrained to vote only for individuals who agree with us on religious issues. A candidate should not be immediately disqualified in our minds simply because they do not hold to biblical Christianity.

Interestingly, this question came up at the Ligonier conference I was at recently in Orlando. During one of the Q&A sessions someone asked if it would be a sin for a Christian to vote for a Mormon or a Roman Catholic to be president. [This was when Rick Santorum, a Roman Catholic, was still in the running]. And when R. C. Sproul read that question that had been submitted, it evoked quite a response from the audience. [Yeah, someone really asked that! And a few little jokes were made.] But then Al Mohler was quick to respond by saying, Absolutely not. It is not a sin to vote for someone who holds different religious beliefs. When we are voting for a president, we are electing someone to a constitutional, secular office, which is different than selecting a pastor for a church. Mohler went on to say that it's important to evaluate the worldview of a presidential candidate, and we need to think as Christians about such things. But we also need to understand the difference between the role and qualifications of a pastor, and the role and qualifications of a president, and the difference between the church and the government. They are not the same. [This is not my main point, but I still want to be clear as I'm on this tangent.] So, to be clear, it is not a sin, it is not wrong, to vote for an individual who holds different religious beliefs. As

Mohler said, if we're only willing to vote for evangelical Christians, then we're in big trouble. We need to look seriously at the candidates who are running, and make a choice about who would best lead the country and who would best represent our moral convictions. [And that concludes that tangent].

All that being said, Joel Osteen's comments reveal much about what he considers Christianity to be. [And this is more central to the point I want to make here]. When Osteen assumes that Barack Obama and Mitt Romney are both Christians, he is making some huge assumptions there. And when he quickly dismisses the debate about whether Mormons are Christians or not, he's making quite a statement about his theological convictions (or lack of theological convictions). Mormonism contradicts biblical Christianity on many crucial points like the Trinity, sin, Christ, the cross, heaven, and Scripture. So for Osteen to imply that Mormonism and Christianity are basically the same shows that Osteen's view of the Christian faith is much broader than what the Bible actually presents.

Similar to the prayer rug, Osteen and many others are capitalizing on our idols of health, wealth, material prosperity, self-esteem, and positive thinking. Truth, then, gets pushed to the side. *We don't need to talk about sin. We don't need to take a stand against homosexuality or abortion. All that matters is encouraging people to succeed and be prosperous.*

My purpose in all of this is for us to see that the people of God, the Bride of Christ, all those who would want to bear the name Christian, are in desperate need of repentance. Hosea's message for Israel is relevant for us today. Judgment is coming. And where there is no repentance, there will be punishment. If we continue after these idols, we will be destroyed with them.

In case, at this point, you are seeing this as a problem that's primarily out there, I want to mention a few other things that may hit closer to home. It may be easy to point our fingers at those who are seeking after superstitious remedies like the prayer rug or who are enamored by motivational preachers. But might there be other subtle ways that we act similarly? Are you ever tempted to think of your baptism in a superstitious way? Or the Lord's Supper? Or church membership? Or your Bible reading plan? *If I just follow these steps, then I should automatically get material blessings from God. If I serve the church, give money to the church, then I should get whatever I want.*

And in terms of the health and wealth gospel, we may be quick to criticize their theology, and rightly so. But in what ways are we, too, bowing down to the same idols? In what ways do we find ourselves in the grips of materialism? To what degree are we putting our hope in physical health and financial stability? Let us

examine our hearts and repent, people of God—here in this church and across this land and throughout the world. Let us hear the prophets of old calling God’s people to flee from idols and return to our God.

God Calls His Son

The second thing I want to focus on in these chapters is the statement in 11:1 about God calling His son. "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." This is a reference to the exodus when God delivered the people out of Egypt. It would be hard to overstate the importance of that event for God’s people. God delivered them from the oppression of Pharaoh. God delivered them in a miraculous way, inflicting Egypt with 10 plagues but passing over the Israelites. God brought His people through the waters and destroyed their enemies. And we read, in the course of all those events, that God speaks of Israel as His firstborn son. Here’s what God said to Moses when He sent Moses to deliver the people.

“When you go back to Egypt, see that you do before Pharaoh all the miracles that I have put in your power. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, “Let my son go that he may serve me.” If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son.’ ” (Exodus 4:21-23)

In Hosea the predominant metaphor has been of marriage. God is the husband, and Israel is the wife. But here’s another metaphor—that of Father and son. And do you sense the compassion here, and the tenderness of this statement? We’ll see this more in the next point as we look further in chapter 11. God loves His people as a firstborn son. And He showed His love toward young Israel in calling them out of Egypt.

What’s really interesting is to see how this verse is quoted by the Gospel-writer, Matthew. And he applies it to Jesus. Last week we saw how the Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, cited Hosea 6:2 in reference to Jesus’ resurrection on the third day. In Hosea 6:2, which is a statement of repentance, it says, “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.” Reading that in its original context, we might not guess that there’s some connection with Jesus’ resurrection. But when we look at the broader context of the Old Testament and the history of Israel, we can see various theological connections between Israel’s history and Jesus’ life.

Hosea 11:1 is another example of this. Israel, as God’s firstborn son, points forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, God’s eternal Son. And just as God protected and delivered Israel, He

also protected and delivered Jesus. Pharaoh, back in Moses' day, tried to eliminate the seed of Israel by killing all the infant boys. Likewise, Herod, in Jesus' day, tried to eliminate the Christ child by ordering that all of the male children in Bethlehem 2 years old or younger be killed. In both cases we see that God is sovereign to preserve His people, and He's sovereign to bring about His plans of redemption.

So Matthew is revealing to us a deep connection in Scripture between Israel and Jesus. The history of Israel and the life of Jesus are so intertwined in the plans of God that it can be accurately said that Jesus' deliverance from Herod's oppression is a fulfillment of what Hosea 11:1 says about God calling His son out of Egypt. That's what Matthew 2:13-16 says. This is after the wise men had visited Jesus in Bethlehem, and then the wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod. And then it says this about Joseph and Mary the baby Jesus.

" Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, "Out of Egypt I called my son." Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men."

We might not immediately see the connection. Quoting that verse from Hosea 11:1 might seem a little strange to us at first. But when we begin to understand the deeper thematic parallels between Israel and Christ, we can appreciate the Spirit-inspired insights of the New Testament writers. What God said about Israel, His firstborn son, was pointing forward to something else, something even bigger. And it's in the life of Jesus Christ that we see the fulfillment.

God's Tender Compassion

And this leads to the final point, which is to see God's tender compassion. We see God's tender compassion for His people most clearly in sending His own Son to live and die and rise again on our behalf. It's the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that brings about the reversals we have observed earlier in Hosea, and that we continue to see in these chapters.

Do you remember the reversals we saw in chapters 1-2? Two of the most obvious ones have to do with the names of the

children. One child was named No Mercy, and another child was named, Not My People. For the Lord said, “you are not my people, and I am not your God.” But in 2:23 the Lord says, “I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’” These are the amazing, Gospel reversals of the book of Hosea.

And we continue to see them in the chapters we’ve been covering this morning. For instance, in 8:13 and 9:9 it is said that the Lord will remember their iniquity and punish their sins. And in 9:15 it even says, “Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels.”

Then we come to chapter 11 and see another stark reversal and one of the tenderest expressions of God’s love for His people. Let’s begin in verse 5-7.

"They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. [This is the warning that they will be overtaken by Assyria. It will be as though they are going back into captivity, like their experience in Egypt] The sword shall rage against their cities, consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels. My people [He does refer to them as “My people,” which anticipates the loving words that will come in the next verse] are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all.”

They would certainly go into exile and reap the consequences of their rebellion. But as the following verses go on to express, God’s discipline does not mean an end to His love for them. He disciplines—Yes. And His discipline can be very painful. But because of Christ’s redemption, even the discipline of God’s people is for their good.

Look at verses 8-9. “How can I give you up, O Ephraim [Ephraim being another name for Israel]? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? [These were cities near Sodom and Gomorrah that were utterly destroyed] My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. 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.”

Can you hear God’s tender compassion in those words? I want you to hear God’s heart in this passage. I want you to be overwhelmed by His love for His people—a love that we most definitely do not deserve, but God feels so intensely nonetheless. It is this God who sent His own beloved Son to die in our place. His heart breaks for His people. He yearns for us to know Him. It

grieves Him and angers Him to see us rebelling against Him. And it brings Him great joy to see us loving Him, submitting to Him, following Him, delighting in Him.

And so we have this amazing Gospel reversal, that those who deserve no mercy, who do not deserve to be God's people, who deserve to be cast out of God's presence forever, ones such as these are shown mercy, are adopted as God's children, and are ushered into His presence forever, all because of the blood of Jesus Christ. I hope you will meditate on God's tender compassion for His people, and I pray you will be drawn to Him today.