



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 11:1-11

“Eternal Love: Anguishing, yet Vanquishing”

TRANSCRIPT

Hosea chapter 11 verse 1 through verse 11.

“When Israel was a youth I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son.”

I didn't intend to say anything about this in the message, but perhaps someone will come and say something afterwards, why didn't you say something about the fact that Matthew cites this text in Matthew chapter 2 and refers this to Jesus Christ? “And out of Egypt I called my Son.”

Well the basis upon which Matthew does it is that Israel is a type of our Lord Jesus Christ. And our Lord recapitulates in his history; in fact, we could say it of Israel: the history of the other. And there are striking similarities. And just as Egypt was the place of bondage, and Israel had to be called out of Egypt in order for the Abrahamic covenant promises to find fulfillment, so our Lord Jesus was in Egypt and it was necessary that he be called out of Egypt in order that, through the blood that was shed on Calvary's cross to ratify that covenant and make those promises available to the promised seed of Abraham. Matthew was not reading something into Hosea that was not there; it is there. And so we

read, out of Egypt I called my son, but we look on to the greater Israel, the Lord Jesus Christ.

“The more they called them, (the “they” is a reference to the prophets, of course)
The more they (that is, Israel) went from them;
They kept sacrificing to the Baals
And burning incense to idols.
Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk,
I took them in My arms;
But they did not know that I healed them.
I led them –

That word translated “led” in the New American Standard Bible is really a word that means “to draw,” and it is used in passages like Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 3 where the great prophet writes these words: “The LORD appeared to him from afar, saying, ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness,’” So,

“I drew them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,
And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws;”

It is possible if we make a couple of emendations of the ancient Masoretic text to refer this to the Lord as Father, and translate as some versions have done,

“And I became to them like those who lift a baby to their cheeks.”

Have you ever seen a father who picks up his own little infant and takes the infant up and puts the infant next to his cheek? It’s possible to render it that way, and some feel that since the flow of thought is of a father and a son, that that is the more likely sense of verse 4,

“I led them with cords of a man, with bonds of love,
And I became to them like those who lift a baby to their cheeks.”

Since the Old Testament text that we have is generally reliable, and since it reads rather this way, probably that is not the sense. And the prophet is probably thinking here the metaphor of a herdsman.

“And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws,
And I bent down and fed them.
They will not return to the land of Egypt;”

That’s an interesting statement, because if you’ve been reading Hosea at all, you may have remembered in verse 13 of chapter 8, the last line he said, They will return to Egypt. And here, they will not return to the land of Egypt, and there are a couple of other places in this same prophecy where it says, They will go to Egypt.

It is possible to eliminate that problem by simply translating verse 5 as a question, and I believe, though I don’t have the New International Version before me, but it is possible to render this as a question, as the NIV does: “Will they not return to the land of Egypt? Will not Assyria be their king? Because they refused to return to Me.” Thus, rendering it as a question, as it is possible to do, then we have harmony with the various references in the book, and I think that is probably right, and that illustrates the fact that there is no version of the Bible translated yet that is perfect. The reason being that men

differ over the content of the passages, and at this point we don’t have unanimity. And I’m sure if I were to render the Old and New Testaments, we might still have someone who would object that inspired translation [laughter]. Now the 6th verse,

“And the sword will whirl against their cities,
And will demolish their gate bars
And consume them because of their counsels.
So My people are bent on turning from Me.
Though they call them to the One on high,
None at all exalts Him.
How can I give you up, O Ephraim?
How can I surrender you, O Israel?
How can I make you like Admah?
How can I treat you like Zeboiim? (These are two towns that were destroyed when Sodom and Gommorah were destroyed.)
My heart is turned over within Me, (this may be rendered, My heart is turned against Me)
All My compassions are kindled.
I will not execute My fierce anger;
I will not destroy Ephraim again
For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst,
And I will not come in wrath. (Now notice how the tension flees and how quietness and calmness comes)
They will walk after the LORD,
He will roar like a lion;
Indeed He will roar
And His sons will come trembling from the west.

They will come trembling like birds from Egypt
And like doves from the land of Assyria;
And I will settle them in their houses, declares the LORD.”

May God bless this reading of his word.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these marvelous prophecies and promises which through the Prophet Hosea Thou hast given to Israel and ultimately also to us. For the things written before time are written for our learning and admonition, upon whom the ends of ages will come. O God, we are grateful. We are thankful that we have this privilege and opportunity which so many millions of people have never had. O surely Lord, Thou hast been good to us and we give thanks before Thee in worship and praise and adoration. Thou art a great God. Thou art our God. We give thanks to Thy name through Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

And Lord, we bring before Thee the needs of this congregation. They are many. Thou knowest the names and the requests that are mentioned in our calendar of concern. We bring them all to Thee, and we pray that Thou wilt minister to Them out of the consolation of Thy great heart. We pray for those who are bereaved, and we ask Lord a special blessing for them. We thank Thee for all who are part of this fellowship who are members and friends and visitors today. We pray for each one of them.

Bless our elders and deacons, give them wisdom and guidance and direction as they serve us. Enable us also to render to them the submission that belongs to those that are over us in the Lord. We pray for our country, for our President, for those who are over us politically. We ask Lord for wisdom and guidance for them and for direction in the critical days in which we live.

We thank Thee for the privilege of proclaiming the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are particularly thankful, Lord, for the radio ministry, for the tape ministry, for the publications and for the Bible classes, for the many forms of outreach, for the responses

that we receive, we are grateful O God. We ask that Thou wilt save souls through ministry and Thou wilt build up the faith, encouraging them. May the whole body of Christ be blessed thereby.

We commit this meeting to Thee and ask Thy blessing upon it in Jesus’ name.
Amen.

[Message] If you should ever wonder why the Prophet Hosea is called the Prophet of Unconditional Love, a simple reading of chapter 11 would give you the answer. And if you should wonder why he is called the tenderest soul of all the prophets, you would also find an answer in Hosea chapter 11. And here we will take a look at our subject this morning of “Eternal Love: Anguishing yet Vanquishing,” and I think that is the thing that will emerge. The prophet is the prophet of unconditional love. Three times he declares that God’s wrath is not the final word for his people Israel, his prodigal son.

The dominant note of chapters 1 through 10 has been the note of obedience and judgment, but in chapter 11 through 14 the dominant note becomes the divine, conquering love, unfrustratable and ultimately, irresistible. Modern Old Testament scholarship likes to think that the Book of Deuteronomy is a late book, and that the Book of Hosea is actually earlier than the Book of Deuteronomy. Now, I do not pose as a specialist in Old Testament theology and in Old Testament study, and so I follow the traditional, generally the traditional dating of the books of the Old Testament. If that were so, then Hosea becomes the first of the writers of the Old Testament to base the relationship of the Nation Israel to the Lord God upon eternal love.

Well, we will probably, as we study the Scriptures, come to the conclusion that Deuteronomy is earlier than Hosea, but even then we discover in Deuteronomy, which in that case is not one that borrows from Hosea, but one from whom Hosea borrows, the fundamental relationship between the Lord God and the Nation Israel is based upon his sovereign love. He loves sovereignly with boundless love, because he loves.

One cannot go behind that if he follows the teaching of holy Scripture. When God tells us that he loves his people, he doesn’t tell us why. He loves his people because he loves his people. As we have often said, the love of God is sovereign. All love that is true love is sovereign. A young man who loves his wife because she cooks does not really love her properly. If he loves her and marries her because she’s wealthy, then he doesn’t really love her with sovereign love. If he loves her and marries her because she’s beautiful, then of course, he doesn’t really love her with sovereign love.

Love that is genuine love is sovereign love. You cannot explain it. Often, you will say, why did he marry her? I don’t see anything in her. But he saw something within her, expressing what happened to him by loving her and marrying her. True love is sovereign love, and there is no rational explanation for its satisfying love to others.

So when God says he loves Israel, he doesn’t say why. He denies all of the reasons that we might bring forward. He says he didn’t love her because she was more numerous than others and various other reasons. He loved her because he loved her.

Now, in the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul, speaking about the Abrahamic Covenant promises says, “From the standpoint of the gospel, they, Israel, are enemies for your, Gentiles, sake. But from the standpoint of election, they are beloved for the sake of the fathers.” He loves because he loves.

Now, we have been in the earlier chapters of Hosea stressing the relationship between God and Israel as a relationship to be likened to the relationship of a husband and a wife. Well now, Hosea varies the figure in chapter 11, and he will speak of the relationship of the Lord God to the Nation Israel as the relation of a father to a son. That’s not startling really, for in the Old Testament one’s finds that, really. For example, in Deuteronomy, in the song of Moses in chapter 32 verse 36, Moses writes, “Do you thus repay the Lord O foolish and unwise people? Is he not your father who has bought you? He has made you and established you.” And then in the eighth verse of that chapter he writes, “You neglected the rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth.”

So, the relationship of a father to a son is a beautiful relationship, and it underscores the cost of the love of God. It underscores the ardor and anguish of the love of God, and it underscores also the vulnerability of the love of God. And we shall see all of those things here in Hosea chapter 11.

In the opening four verses, Hosea speaks of God’s love and Israel’s rebellion. It’s a marvelous picture of love under a series of tender figures. If we are to assume the text of the Old Testament that we have, and we have a father’s love expressed in verse 4, but it’s the love of a father expressed under other figures also.

We read, for example, when Israel was a youth, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. And then in the third verse, It is I who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them in my arms and one can picture in his mind a Father helping the little infant to walk, stumbling, weaving, falling were it not for the fact that the Father holds his hands. It’s a picture of love and devotion to the well-being of the other person. And then we also have the figure of a nurse in verse 3, Yet it is I who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them in my arms, yet they did not know that I healed them. That healing, incidentally, in other places in the Book of Hosea, we don’t have time to turn to them, is a word of redemption, and so the thought is of the redeeming power of God manifested toward the Nation Israel. He is also a husband to them: I drew them with cords of a man, with bonds of love. Beyond the stages of infancy, he loved them as children, he loves them also as they grow to maturity. His love is an eternal, unchanging, immutable love.

And finally, he presents the figure of a herdsman in the 4th verse, “And I became to them as one who lifts the yoke from their jaws, and I bent down and fed them.” And of course, the picture is of a farmer or a workman who has some animals who are plowing during the day, and they are weary and tired as the day draws to an end, and finally as they make their way home, the farmer goes in and he takes off the yoke from the shoulders of the animal, and then allows the weary animal to rest and to eat. And this is what the Lord God says that he has done for Israel.

It’s very striking, is it not, that when we read the Old Testament, that God wants Israel to respond to him? It’s not that he lays down laws for them and forces them to worship them. Now the worldling is flogged to duty by fear. In ancient times when Xerxes and the Persians made their way toward Greece, one could have told before hand who was going to win that battle, for the great masses of the Persians were flogged to war by their superiors. They didn’t really want a war, but they were forced to. Whereas, the Greeks and the Spartans, they were defending their country, and they went forth out of a sense of motivation that came from within. It’s not surprising they slaughtered the Persians, because being flogged to action by fear, well, that’s a handicap right at the beginning.

We who are Christians do not serve the Lord God because we are forced to do so or because we are put under law. Rather, we do it by virtue of the grace that has been shown to us. We worship the Lord because we are saved not by our efforts, but we are saved by the merits of another, and we recognize that we could never have saved ourselves, and when we come to recognize that it is by the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ who has offered the atoning sacrifice, and we’re saved by the merits of another, then, of course, we have appreciation for the grace of God shown to us, and we desire to serve him and worship him out of love and gratitude to him.

The Prophet Hosea knows this, and he proclaims this in his word in the last, next to last, verse in the last chapter he says, “From me comes your fruit.” And the magnificent thing about our great God is that he takes off all of the yokes that have been put upon us, too. Israel in the Old Testament was put under the law. It was a yoke. And Peter, later when he has had the yoke lifted from his shoulders and has been fed by divine grace, he says, “We don’t want to put a yoke upon those like that yoke which we were unable to bear.” We believe that through faith we are saved through the principle of grace, and so he appreciated it.

The Lord God, when he saves us, takes off all of our yokes – the yoke of the law of Moses, the yoke of the sense of necessity of trying to please God by what we do. The yoke of sin, for sin is a yoke. We are brought into bondage of sin when we sin. We have the desire to sin further. One sin leads to another sin. And having been born in sin, we are born in bondage, and the more we live, the more we come to be in bondage to sin, and if we are enlightened, we’re enlightened to discover the anguish and bondage of displeasing the Lord God. We are delivered from the yoke of cares, also.

I remember a story that Mr. Spurgeon tells in which he describes a minister calling upon a couple, and there was a little infant playing on the floor. And in the course of the conversation, the father looked over at the infant and said, “Isn’t it nice to be an infant? Not a care in the world. You can just play and the father and mother take care of the infant. Not a care in the world.” We often say to children, “Enjoy yourself now; when you grow up, you’ll find things are different.” And you expect as an infant and a child for your father to take care of you.

Now, the father was surprised the next Sunday when the minister went into the pulpit and he said, “You know, I was visiting in a home, and I heard a father say, isn’t it nice to be an infant?, and a child and have a father, and all of the needs and cares of life are met by the father. And then he went on to speak to the congregation and he said to them, “Don’t you understand the Scriptures say we are the children of God?” If a little child may expect his parents to care for him, how much more we who are the children of the eternal God? That is what God is trying to say to us, that he cares for us and further has the power to do what earthly fathers cannot do.

We are the children of God, and if that simple truth were to come home to us, we’d drive quite a few Christian psychiatrists and psychologists into another field of endeavor. But, today, because Christians do not recognize this and do not in faith lean upon a heavenly Father in the midst of their trials, it’s not surprising that they’re having various types of problems.

Now, I don’t mean to attack those men. They sense a need. But the need often exists in the failure to recognize the magnificent provision made for us in holy Scripture. Scripture is sufficient for the saints of God.

Now notice that it says in the 4th verse, that I bent down and fed them. That is, the Lord God feeds his children. With what does he feed them? Oh well, he feeds them with the meat of the doctrine of divine substitution, the doctrine that there is someone who has come from heaven and has substituted for us under the judgment of God upon the cross at Calvary. And because he has borne our judgment to the full, we have the confidence and the assurance that we shall never have to bear that judgment.

All of heaven’s claims against us, those for whom Christ died, have been met in the sacrifice of Christ, and heaven itself can bring no further claim against us. He’s fed us with the mighty doctrine of divine substitution. That’s why those who believe in sovereign grace believe in the doctrine of substitution. Those who find it difficult to believe in substitution, well naturally they will have problems with the word of God, and ultimately they will have problems in their lives. But we believe in the great doctrine of divine substitution.

And then he has also fed us with the doctrine of the covenants of the word of God, those unconditional promises that he has given to the people of God, beginning with the promises to the people of Abraham, the promises to David, the great promises of the New Covenant, ratified and confirmed by the Lord Jesus when he took the bread and the wine and said, “This is the new covenant in my blood which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” And then included in that all of the other promises that flow out of what Christ has done. We have really been fed in the banqueting house of an eternal king.

And then if we were to divide this up into all of the individuals’ blessings, the blessing of divine election from which this has come. The blessing of divine justification, declared righteous before the God of heaven. The doctrine of union with the Lord Jesus

Christ. The doctrine of the presence of Holy Spirit both now and forever in the hearts of the redeemed. Ah, you cannot stop once you start to think about those magnificent blessings that he has given to us in sovereign grace.

Now you would think that Israel in the light of this would have been greatly responsive to the word of God, but Hosea says no. Israel has been like a refractory animal; she has been a disobedient son. Notice verse 2, “The more they called them, the more they went from them.” Verse 3, “They did not know I healed them.” Verse 7, the climax, “So my people are hung on turning from me.” Just like I would hang a hat on a rack, they are hung on turning from the Lord God. Oh, the difference between eternal love and human love.

I went to Oklahoma last weekend. I learned something up there. Oklahoma does have a few spots that are pretty. [Laughter] Mr. Pryor’s smiling over there because he already knew this. But I didn’t know it. I went up over there to the northeastern corner of Oklahoma, and it is really pretty there. They even have trees up there. And they have also lakes, beautiful lakes – big lakes. And the mountains, well, hills, but they’re nice mountains, nice trees, like lakes. Ah, it’s a lovely spot. I think one of these days I’ll go back there when nobody’s looking, spend a little time in vacation up there.

It’s really a lovely spot, and I went up to preach at Tallequah Bible Church and spoke Friday night and Saturday night and twice on Sunday. And Sunday after the morning service we were taken out to the lake, a beautiful spot, went to a restaurant in which you looked out, down through something like between hills and saw something, the beautiful lake. And we went into eat, I think it was called Tenkiller Lake – that’s a good Oklahoma name, isn’t it?

And we went there, sat down at the table, and the music was playing, but the music: country/Western. [Laughter] And the song [Johnson laughs] – song, started to say hymn – [more laughter] the song they were playing, I said, “What in the world is that they’re playing?”

And Meredith Sides who’s the pastor of the church, and he’s an Oklahoman – no, he’s a Texan; I take it back – but he’s been in Oklahoma a good while. This is his second pastorate up there. He said, that’s “Fading Love.”

I said, “Oh, that’s very fitting for the message tonight, because we’re going to talk about unfading love tonight.” This is unfading love of which we have reference here in Hosea chapter 11.

Now you would think of course if God had given these great promises and Israel has turned away from him that judgment and final judgment would be the only response of a sovereign, holy God, would you not? Immutable love, of course cannot cast off the nation. In fact, the Apostle Paul would say, God has not cast off his people, has he? in Romans 11 and verse 1. Well, while a sovereign, immutably loving God cannot cast off his people, he can discipline his people. And their condition is that they are bent on turning from me, and so they will be disciplined. And they will return to Egypt. And they will go into Assyria in discipline.

Oh, the pitiful irony that they will go back to Egypt, the place from which the sovereign God in magnificent mercy brought them out in the first place by the redemption that anticipated the redemption of Christ. Now the disobedient nation will, as refugees go back to the place from which they came, as if an individual should go back under the bondage of sin, back under the bondage of judgment, back under the bondage of the cares of life, having been delivered by the Lord God. Oh, the irony of it. They returned to the land from which they had been brought up by the Lord God.

You might think of course that judgment should be what they deserve and what they should have. Like the preacher who was trying to teach some little kids from Glasgow who were street urchins, and he had them all in the room, and he was explaining to them the parable of the prodigal son, and explaining how the prodigal son had come to his father, sought his inheritance, had gone out and wasted everything in riotous living, and now he was going to come back to the father, and the preacher and

teacher stopped and said, “What do you think the father will do to him?” And the little boy blurted out what was on his mind from his own experience. He said, “He’ll bash him!” [Laughter]

Well, that’s what you might that the Lord would do. He will bash Israel. But now, we look at God’s response, and we note his conquering, distinguishing grace. And will you notice first in this 8th verse, this son, this elect, wandering prodigal is addressed face to face now. “How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I tread you like Zeboiim?”

It’s almost as if the prodigal stood before the prodigal now, and the question is raised, “Shall I execute the judgment that is called for?” For remember, in the Old Testament, this is a word to the wise. For you fathers, and for you sons, in the Old Testament when God gave Moses the Mosaic law, he said, if a son continues in his rebellion against his father, he should be stoned to death.

Now here is a son that has been disobedient to the Lord God and is actually hung on turning from him. And so obviously there is a problem here, and God in a compassionate kind of intervention, interrupts his words concerning moral cause and political effect in order to express what is deep down with the being of God.

And in emotional terms, he speaks of the conflict between justice and mercy. Justice demands that Israel be destroyed, but God is also merciful. And here the two are in conflict: the justice of God and the mercy of God. In the Old Testament we read, “Mercy and truth are met together. Righteousness and peace have kissed each other,” in the provision made in holy Scripture. And so, how can I give you up, O Ephraim?

And he will point out that election is stronger than their sin, but he will not do it at the expense of justice. Election is stronger than their sin only through a third part. So how can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like those cities that were destroyed when Sodom and Gommorrah were destroyed? Justice knows only one answer: give them up, bash them.

But there is something else within the heart of God. And so he says, “My heart is turned over within me.” Or, as the Hebrew text may be translated, “My heart has turned itself against me,” and God feels in his deepest being the conflict in this case between justice and mercy. At the end of the eighth verse he says, “All my compassions are kindled.”

That Hebrew word, translated, *kamar*, translated here kindled, is a word that means “to grow warm, tender,” “to be or to grow hot.” There are two beautiful instances of it in the Old Testament. The first in Genesis chapter 43 and verse 30, and you’ll remember that when Joseph was sold into captivity, there was another son of Rachel, just two of the sons of Jacob’s favorite wife. Joseph was the oldest and Benjamin was the youngest. And when of course the sons of Jacob came to Egypt looking for help in the famine, Joseph is now the prime minister, but they don’t know it.

And so they come to the prime minister and the prime minister deals with them, and he’s anxious to have a look at his father and also at his younger brother. And finally by the things that wise Joseph does, those Hebrew people are brought down into the province of Egypt and preserved for the future purposes that God has for them.

But finally when Benjamin comes before him in the 43rd chapter of Genesis, we read, “And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother’s son, and he said, is this your youngest brother of whom you spoke to me?” And he said, “May God be gracious to you, my son” – they still don’t know each other; Joseph knows them but they don’t know he’s really Joseph, and when he said that, may God be gracious to you my son, we read – “And Joseph hurried out, for he was deeply stirred over his brother and he sought a place to weep, and entered his chamber and wept there.”

This brother that he had thought about for so long, this brother, upon whom he had set his heart of love, to see him was too much for the prime minister, and he rushed off into an anteroom and broke down and wept, deeply stirred over him. That’s the word that’s used here. My compassions are deeply stirred.

And then the other instance is that which you’re familiar with. It’s the instance in which Solomon demonstrated the wisdom of God. Two harlots were living together. They both had children. Two infants were born about the same time. One of the harlots rolled over on her child during the night and it was smothered to death. And so she hastily took her infant and swapped her infant for the infant of the other and laid claim to it. The other recognized the next morning that it was not her child that she was getting ready to nurse, and so they took the matter before Solomon the great king for adjudication.

And they’re talking and they said, Oh my lord, this woman and I live in the same house, and I gave birth to a child while she was in the house, and it happened on the third day after I gave birth that his woman also gave birth to a child, and we were together. There was no stranger with us in the house, only the two of us in the house, and this woman’s son died in the night because she lay on it.

So she arose in the middle of the night and took my son from beside me while your maidservant slept, and [sic, redacted] laid him in her bosom then laid her dead son in my bosom. And when I rose in the morning to nurse me son, behold, he was dead. But when I looked at him carefully in the morning, behold, he was not my son whom I had borne.

Then the other woman said, No, for the living one is my son, and the dead one is your son. But the first woman said, No, for the dead one is your son and the living one is mine. Thus they spoke before the king. You can sense the argument that was going on.

And finally Solomon said, “The one says this is my son who is living, and your son is the dead one, and the other says no, for your son is the dead one and my son is the living one.” And he turned around and said, “Get me a sword.” So they brought a sword to the king. And he said, “Divide the living child in two and give half to the one and half to the other.”

And then we read these significant words. Then the woman whose child was the living one spoke to the king, for she was *deeply stirred* over her son, and said, O my Lord, give her the living child and my no means kill him. But the other said, he’ll be neither mine nor yours; divide him! And the king answered and said, “Give the first woman the living child and by no means kill it. She is his mother.” And we read when all Israel heard the judgment the king had handed down, they feared the king, for they saw the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice.

Ah, that woman, deeply stirred over her infant, that’s the term that is used here. My heart is turned over within me; all my passions are kindled. They are deeply stirred.

John Watson, the Ian McClaren of the Bonnie Briar Bush said, “God is the chief sufferer in the universe.” It’s true if we’re talking about God the Son, and it’s true if we’re talking about the fact of his sovereign, voluntary suffering.

Now, startlingly, verse 9 follows. The prophet says, “I will not execute my fierce anger. I will not destroy Ephraim again, for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst.” God, evidently, has reached the agony of decision, and wrath is not going to have the final word about Israel’s destiny. Why? Because God has lowered his standards? It is really true that love is to be honored, but righteousness and justice is not to be honored? Is it true that in order to save us, God lowers his standards of righteousness and justice? Is he love, but is he not life? One might ask why? Three times he has said, I will not execute my fierce anger.

Well, when we look for an answer, we’re given a partial one: “For, I am God, and not man.” You see, he loves and he is angry and wrathful like men, but as God.” And then further, he says, “The Holy One in your midst.” There is no lowering of the standards of righteousness and justice. The Holy One can be compassionate and at the same time remain holy. What is this? Why this is the cross in the heart of God in the Old Testament.

Someone has said the 8th verse is the greatest verse in the book. Others say the 8th verse is the remorse of God. Well, here is sovereign, eternal love, and I say, if we’re looking for a text in the 11th chapter to be the greatest in the book, it’s not the 8th verse, it’s the 9th verse. Sovereign, eternal love. Look, Hosea’s name, my dear Christian friend, meant “salvation.” But the prophet probably did not understand all that God was speaking about here.

There is one place in Scripture where we have a good and complete and sufficient explanation of what lies back of “how shall I, how shall I, how shall I, I will not, I will not, I will not,” and it is Romans chapter 3 and verse 21 through verse 26 where we note that God’s righteousness is satisfied. It’s his law that’s upheld. He punishes that which is unrighteous, just as unrighteousness deserves. But there is something else. Listen,

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed;”

That’s why he can say, with reference to Israel in the Old Testament, I will not, I will not, I will not, because he passed over Israel’s sins, looking forward to the day when the greater Israel would suffer under the judgment of God and bear to the full the punishment of that sin. And further he says,

“For the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Just? Yes, he is just in the fact that the Lord Jesus bears the sin and punishment of the people of God, but justifier of the people of God, that by that very bearing of the punishment he is able to give to those who believe eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So, he does not lower his standard of righteousness. He is the Holy One in the midst of the people of God, but there is a third part, the Lord Jesus, who takes the judgment from the people of God and makes it possible for the people of God, out of his love and mercy, to extend to them the gift of eternal life.

Calvary, O Calvary; mercy’s vast unfathomed sea, and we respond, love, eternal love to me, Savior, we adore Thee. It is by virtue of the greater Hosea, the Lord Jesus, whose name is Jehovah, or “The Lord is salvation,” that we are able to read, I will not, I will not, I will not.

It’s not surprising, then, at verse 10 that we read, “They will walk after the LORD, he will roar like a lion; indeed He will roar and His sons will come trembling from the west. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt and like doves from the land of Assyria; and I will settle them in their houses, declares the LORD.” This is sovereign, eternal, immutable love, and here we have the triumph of it. The Abrahamic Covenant, promises made hundreds of years ago lead on into the future to Romans chapter 11 where the Apostle will say, “And so, all Israel shall be saved.”

Now our standing, my dear Christian friend, is no less secure than the Nation Israel. We, too, stand by virtue of the special, eternal, immutable, love of God. His attributes, of course are immutable, and his love is immutable. And so by virtue of this, we can be sure you will minister to us out of his lovingkindness.

You know, in the New Testament in Romans 8 it is stated, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not freely give us all things?” If he has done the most for us, he surely will do the rest if he has done this magnificent thing of giving a Savior as a propitiatory sacrifice then he will give all the other blessings in

order that we may have him. That’s what Paul means when he says, “He that spared not his own son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”

There is a great feeling in Christendom and particularly in evangelical Christendom today that God can give the Son for all, but not give the other blessings that make it certain that we will have the blessing of that gift. That runs directly contrary to what Paul says in Romans 8:32. He that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? And so if he has given us Christ to die for us, he has given us the convicting work of the Holy Spirit, he will give us regeneration, he will give us union with Christ. He’ll give us justification. He will still make us the children of God. He must be faithful to his word.

And someone says, “limited atonement” – yes, of course. We all limit the atonement, the Arminians and the Calvinists. Arminians limit its effectiveness and its efficacy. Christ died for all, but all are not saved. The atonement does not really save. Calvinists limit the extent of the atonement. It is for the people of God. Arminians limit the depth of the atonement; it doesn’t really deliver those for whom it is made. Calvinists limit its breadth, but not its depth. The Arminians limit its power – it’s not powerful enough to save. We limit its purpose. Who limits? Man or God?

No Christian down deep in his heart can have any feeling that it is proper for a divine being to limit his work. Not man. We believe, I believe, in a sovereign, immutable, eternal love from a sovereign, immutable, eternal God. O God, we worship Thee, we praise Thee. Thou art our God! And always our God, sovereign, immutable. Thou hast loved us in Christ. That work is effective.

If you’re here today and you’ve never believed in Christ, we invite you to come to this God who loves like this. We recommend him to you. He satisfies his people. He’s like a loving father who has little infants playing around and cares for them, but in addition, he has the power to do everything that is upon his heart. Human fathers

cannot. The divine Father can. Come to Christ. Believe on him. Trust in him and boldly acknowledge him. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] How marvelous, Lord that Thou should so reveal Thyself to us, giving us a magnificent insight into the heart of the triune God, we magnify Thy righteousness. Thou are the Holy One of Israel, our Holy One. We magnify Thy grace, grace in the blood of the cross. O God, Thou art our God now and forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.