“Hope for Prodigal Children”

Hosea 11:1-11; Luke 15:11-27

(notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 2/21/21)

 Even while the prodigal son was in the pigpen of his rebellion, he was still the son of his father. In Hosea’s day, Israel turned their backs on God and pursued other gods. But even in the depths of their rebellion, God’s love remained loyal to them. Today’s scripture passages highlight two truths about the love of God:

1. God’s love for His people is sourced in God Himself. It’s based on the nature of God, not on human nature. On my worst day, I am still the undeserving beneficiary of God’s love.
2. God’s love for His own is not earned by our loveliness, or lost by our unloveliness.

The previous chapters of Hosea have been like a long journey through a deep, dark valley, chronicling the many sins of God’s people. They were proud, sinful, and idolatrous, failing in every aspect of obedience, even while maintaining the outward trappings of a religious people. Hosea was called to be a living illustration of God’s marriage (covenant) to His people. Don’t read this passage and think that it is just about “those old Hebrews”. It’s about us, too. We, too, are prone to wander. We, too, fail to love God exclusively. We, too, are prodigals when it comes to our relationship with God. (Q1) But now, finally, in Hosea 11 this gloom gives way to bright hope!

In Hosea 11:8 God speaks tenderly to His backsliding children. His heart is churning because He knows they deserve His wrath and anger because of their sin, but His love for His own is tender, like a parent helping a toddler learn to walk (v. 3-4). Their sins are no less putrid than the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah, but He gently tugs them (and us) back to Him. (Q2) He doesn’t have to do this; He delights to do this! Does God’s love still allow discipline? See v. 5-6. Is this love? Yes! It’s not a permissive love; it’s a severe love. God disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:6). It’s as if God is saying, “I love you too much to let you continue in your waywardness. You have wasted too much life by living by the wisdom of your culture instead of living by My wisdom.” And if you try to squirm out of His love, He still will not let you go… He still will not give up on you. (Q3)

Even the best human love falls short of God’s love. God’s love for His own is holy. When we are wronged, we tend to “write people off.” God doesn’t. He still loves us. When we are sinned against by a rebellious, prodigal, cold-hearted child who is consumed by self, we feel like going back to the prescription from Deuteronomy: stoning! But God has another plan: forgiveness. Look again at Hosea 11:1. The “son” mentioned there is the “Son” mentioned in Matt. 2:14-15. God’s love for His own is redemptive. The same God who condemns sin allows for redemption and forgiveness through faith in His Son, Jesus. (Q4)

Jesus came to redeem us out of our sinful alienation from God. Jesus took our shame so that we need not be ashamed before God. GOD’S WRATH AND HIS HOLY LOVE ARE BOTH SATISFIED AT THE CROSS OF JESUS! The new covenant through Jesus is a covenant of faith, not works. We are redeemed and restored to bear His image. We are being progressively sanctified (made holy) to bear His image.

Remember, it is all to do with His love, not your loveliness. God’s love for you is restorative: He wants to be in a right relationship with you. The father says to the prodigal (you), “Come, there is joy in My house that you have returned.” The one Person who has a perfect knowledge of you loves you perfectly in Christ Jesus. Amen. (Q5)

**QUESTIONS**:

1. What sin do you still struggle with? Too personal? OK, what sins does your neighbor still struggle with?!
2. Sometimes we think, “Of course, God hates their sin of murder or stealing or adultery, but He doesn’t really get all that bothered by my gossip or sloth or looking at certain movies.” What is wrong with this statement?
3. Even at this point, some will STILL not turn back to God. Why?
4. Read John 8:3-12. In your own words, explain how Jesus balanced forgiveness with His hatred of sin. Who else sinned in this passage? Who else needed forgiveness?
5. Google the lyrics of “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us” by Stuart Townend. How forgiving should we be of others? Why?

“Love That Will Not Let Me Go” (George Matheson)

1

 O Love, that wilt not let me go,

I rest my weary soul in Thee;

I give Thee back the life I owe,

That in Thine ocean depths its flow

May richer, fuller be.

2

 O Light, that followest all my way,

I yield my flickering torch to Thee;

My heart restores its borrowed ray,

That in Thy sunshine’s blaze its day

May brighter, fairer be.

3

 O Joy, that seekest me through pain,

I cannot close my heart to Thee;

I trace the rainbow through the rain,

And feel the promise is not vain

That morn shall tearless be.