

HOSEA 11:1-11 (p. 738)

JULY 31, 2022

COLOSSIANS 3:1-11 (p. 952)

BLAINE

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

O' Holy God, quicken our spirits with your own Holy Spirit, and awaken each of us to your Voice, calling us by name! Cause our time of study this morning to be edifying to us and glorifying to you! And please, lead us with cords of human kindness, while guiding us with your steadfast love! We ask this in your Son's Name, Amen.

"REBELLIOUS CHILDREN"

I love to spoil my grandkids! I do. Really. And I've had a number of opportunities to do that lately. I love to give them things, and do things for them. I like to teach them things, and of course help them to discover things on their own. I enjoy creating opportunities to help them grow. I want them to know that they are loved. I want them to realize how important they are. And that they are accepted, no matter what. Spoiling your grandkids is great!

Or maybe not? I mean, I don't want them selfish, right? Or become spoiled little brats. I certainly don't want them to feel "entitled", or as if the world "owes them something". I want them to appreciate all the blessing they receive, not feel as if they "deserve" them. I want to build virtues, and a strong sense of right and wrong. I want them to know in their heart that not all behavior is acceptable. Maybe "spoiled" is not such a good thing after all!

I mean you've spent much time with someone who is spoiled, right? A two-year-old? A rebellious teenager? A self-absorbed adult? Picture someone who is pretty self-centered, or even narcissistic? How does being around them make you feel? What about if they are outright rebellious? Is that what you want for your those you love?

Remember a couple of weeks ago talking about Amos' Plumb Line? There are just certain rules, boundaries, lines of demarcation if you will, that the Lord God wants us to live within. So, when someone colors outside of them, or constantly colors outside of them, particularly for personal gain, it kind of makes us cringe. So, what if the one stretching those boundary markers way beyond their intended path is someone dear to your heart? How long do you think you could tolerate that kind of behavior?

Maybe it's just a phase? Or a momentary blip on the radar? But what if it's not? What if it seems to be a growing trend? Wouldn't you try to nip it in the bud? As a loving parent, wouldn't you want to intercede? Wouldn't there eventually have to be some kind of consequences? I mean, here you are, pouring out love and compassion, showering your beloved with patience and understanding. And here they are, offering disobedience and defiance in return! Your wishes, are totally disregarded. Your authority is completely ignored, if not outright disdained! They don't even want to hear about your life lessons, let alone respect them! Be honest, at least with yourself. Consider the "Long Game", how those you love will ultimately turn out! Wouldn't righteous indignation, at some point, rise to the surface? Wouldn't anger, maybe even rage, eventually boil over?

“When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more I called to my Beloved, the further they fled from me! It was I who took them by the hand, and I who taught them how to walk! It was I who lifted the yoke from their necks, and who bent down to feed them! I was the one who led my people with cords of human kindness and ties of steadfast love! Me! And yet for some reason they don’t seem to acknowledge it, or apparently even care! I took care of them! But they refuse to accept that I am the one who heals them! They are determined to desert me! They call me the Most-High, but do not truly honor me! And now, my heart is torn within me!” ...It sounds to me as if God’s Beloved, God’s People, God’s Children, are acting like spoiled little brats! And it sounds as if Almighty God has just about had enough!

Let me share a story with you, a parable really. I want you to feel the depth of the pain that betrayal, and disobedience can bring to someone who loves deeply. This is a true story by-the-way, a story of real people. I’m going to change the names to protect the innocent though. As if, in fact, there are any “innocents” in the story!

Henry was a farmer, a devout man of Faith. He was also an Elder in his church, and a man who worked extremely hard to make a living for his family. In addition to farming, Henry did a little baking on the side. Gretchen, his wife, was a bit younger than Henry. She was a stay-at-home-mom who concentrated her time and energy on keeping up the house and home. And lately, she has started to get involved in some local Civic Activities as well.

Henry and Gretchen have been married for several years now, and have three children; the oldest is a boy, the middle a girl, and the youngest another boy. And from the outside looking in, they have what appears to be a pretty well-adjusted family! However, there is trouble brewing in paradise!

Gretchen, you see, has a bit of a rebellious streak. No, that would be an understatement. Gretchen has a serious rebellious streak! It's so bad, in fact, that she simply can't play by the rules, any rules, including those of her Marriage Covenant! Currently, she's involved in a number of love affairs. But even that is saying it way too nice! The truth is, Gretchen is quite promiscuous. Anyone who catches her eye, usually ends up in her bed! It's sad really! And the worst part is, there is absolutely no remorse on her part! Gretchen doesn't seem to care what people think, including her husband!

No matter what Henry says or does, Gretchen simply does whatever she wants to do! It's all about her, you see—her pleasure, her excitement, her desires, her thrills! No amount of pleading seems to help! No logical conversations! No counseling with the Priest! No amount of prodding by family and friends! Nothing has any effect at all!

Gretchen's craving for self-gratification, for what she calls freedom and independence, draws her attention away from her Wedding Vows, time and time again! Money and possessions do as well! So, does anything, in fact, that is pleasing to the eye!

Power and prestige, exhilaration and pleasure, simply “having fun”, lures her right out of the home, and out into the street! It’s all about playtime for her! It’s all about mystery and intrigue, new and different! So again, and again, and again, Gretchen is unfaithful to her Covenant Vows!

And now, because this has happened so often, and over such a protracted period of time, her loving husband, Henry, has emotionally pulled away. You can’t really blame him, can you? But even that hasn’t changed anything. Gretchen still continues in her rebellion. So, now Henry is fed up! He wants to divorce her, to send her away!

Again, you can’t really blame him. But what’s amazing, at least to me, is that even in the midst of all this, Henry still loves his wife! In fact, he loves her so much, so deeply, that just the thought of losing her simply breaks his heart! He feels as if he is cutting off a part of who he is! He loves Gretchen, truly, even more than life itself!

What Henry wants is to restore their relationship again, even though he feels abandoned and betrayed! Oh, he’s hurt, monumentally so, devastated actually! But Henry is also very much in love. So, instead of closing the doors for all eternity, what he does is reach out to his bride yet again! He forgives her rebellion, again! He invites her back home, again! And he loves her, even more than before!

Could you do that? Seriously? Would you do that? Could you push through the heartache and pain, through the lack of guilt and remorse, and reach out one more time? Could you look past the defiance, the betrayal, the total disregard for how you feel? Again, there is absolutely no remorse on Gretchen's part!

Henry is pretty gracious, don't you think? Compassionate, way beyond measure! And Gretchen is pretty selfish, wouldn't you say? This is open rebellion, defiance, selfishness on steroids! And it's a persistent pattern of behavior too. Again, this is a true story, one that simply breaks your heart! I've known about this situation for years! So, tell me, how does hearing about Gretchen and Henry make you feel? Sit with that for a moment.

Paul Harvey's "The Rest of the Story" is that this real life-lesson was first shared by The Holy Spirit, through a Prophet named Hosea. That's Henry's real name, by-the-way, in case you hadn't already figured it out. It means "Salvation," which should maybe give us a clue to God's lesson. Gretchen's real name is Gomer. And according to Scripture, she was "very promiscuous". It also says that she was "adulterous" and "a prostitute" even before God told Hosea to marry her. But afterwards as well!

Their kids, the offspring of this metaphoric marriage that Hosea lived out in obedience to the Lord, symbolize the relationship between God and His People. They were given names like "Lo-Ruhamah", meaning "not loved", and "Lo-Ammi", meaning "not my people," and "Jezreel," the name of a valley known for murder and death! Imagine?

In just fourteen chapters, this Old Testament Prophetic book, this real-life parable, fleshes out open rebellion, the lack of faithfulness, rejection of incredible love, and ultimately, forgiveness! God demonstrates that He is a faithful and loving Husband, even though His Beloved, Israel, His Bride, the Church, you and I, have continued to rebelliously whore around!

The message of this story is actually about the unfathomable love of the Lord for His people, His rebellious, unfaithful Bride! But it is played out on a stage of adultery! Hosea was commanded, by the Lord, to marry a woman who He revealed ahead of time would be unfaithful to him, and who would cause him all kinds of headaches. He was told beforehand that she would bear children, some of whom would be fathered by other men. But he was also told that their life together, her adultery, and their children, would be a living, prophetic example to God's People. And hopefully, a lesson to be learned. So, Hosea, in his faithfulness, obeyed. Can you imagine that?

Their life, this tragic, true love story, transcends the tale of a young man and women, and speaks of God's love for His people, as well as the unfaithful response of His Bride. A Covenant had been made! And God was faithful to it! His love was steadfast, and His commitment was unbroken! But Israel, like Gomer, was adulterous, spurning God's love and turning to other false gods for instant gratification! Their sins, of course, would ultimately cause their destruction, and rouse God's anger, resulting in their punishment!

But even in the midst of Israel's immorality, God showed mercy! He offered hope! He expressed His infinite love for, and everlasting commitment to, His people! And He announced the Good News that repentance brings blessing! The Key Phrase in the entire tragic love story comes in Hosea 3:1; "Then the Lord said to me, 'Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the Lord still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods, and love to worship them'"!

This is our story too folks! It is a visual metaphor of our lives as well, and our tragic struggle in our own relationship with the Almighty! We are His Beloved, deeply cared for, graciously loved! Yet those who repeatedly search for love and affection in all the wrong places! This story confronts us, or at least it should, right in the middle of our own selfishness and self-will! Our disloyalty is so often monumental, and graphically displayed for all to see!

In this lesson, we witness our personal fascination with the gods of this world, and with the idols that we create to run around with! We too forsake the true, compassionate, forgiveness of our Beloved Husband, and we too run after pleasure wherever it can be found! If hearing this story doesn't make us feel an overwhelming sense of shame, it certainly should! Because we too, like Gomer, are a truly rebellious lot! And yet our God, our immeasurably faithful lover, continues to reach out to us, continually calls us back with open arms, continues to offer blessings, if we but repent.

Israel had abandoned God, and went off with the gods of the culture around them. They no longer kept faithful to their Covenant Vows, promised to the One who had brought them up out of Egypt, by the hand, and into the Promised Land! No longer did the people keep The Lord first in their lives, or His Commandments and Decree ever before them! Instead, they started worshipping the gods of the world around them, and then justified it with fancy thoughts and ideas! That really ought to sound familiar! At least if we are honest! The only question is, what so-called “gods” are we whoring around with today, and how do we turn, and come back home!

I remember studying this very text from Hosea about nine or ten years ago. I was out on our porch swing and had my Bible opened in front of me. I stopped for a moment to contemplate what God was saying. I closed my eyes, and started to pray. But when I looked back down, something extraordinary happened. The text was somehow different.

The infidelity of God’s people was still right there, staring me in the face. As were their Broken Covenant Vows. And the proclamation of God’s righteous anger, burning against His unfaithful Bride, was still there as well. This was coupled, of course, with His overwhelming self-giving love for them anyway! But something had obviously changed! It took a couple of minutes, but then I noticed. While I was thinking, with my eyes closed, a gentle breeze had blown through. Maybe it was the Holy Spirit? But it quietly turned several pages in my Bible. So, when I picked it back up, I was now reading Jeremiah eleven, instead of Hosea eleven. You’ll have to check it out.

That breeze must have also blown “the Veil of Incomprehension” aside as well. Because it slowly started to lift, and suddenly I could see that this message bears repeating! You see Hosea was a prophetic warning to God’s Beloved, in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, in the middle of the Eighth Century BC, just before the Assyrians destroyed the nation of Israel completely! And Jeremiah, my God-given text that day, was a prophetic warning to God’s Beloved, in the Southern Kingdom of Judah, about one hundred and fifty years later, just before the Babylonians destroyed that nation completely.

Both Prophets were talking to God’s Rebellious Children, or Bride! Both Prophets were warning them of the consequences that would come from their selfish rebellious ways! And both Prophets of Almighty God, one hundred and fifty years apart, were trying to get the People of God to repent of their unfaithfulness, to turn back to their Beloved, and thus avoid the Righteous Fury of Almighty God!

History repeated itself! The only difference was time! Destruction followed on the heels of unfaithfulness! The ultimate goal wasn’t punishment, though! The ultimate goal was restoration! The people were warned ahead of time! They could have avoided all the bad, all of the Judgment, all of the separation! Just like those who had to wander around in the wilderness for forty years during the Exodus! They knew! They knew, ahead of time!

Now jump ahead another seven hundred and fifty years from the time of Hosea. Listen to what the Apostle Paul says in today's New Testament lesson from Colossians. Once again, the Bride of Christ is given a warning from God, through a Prophet! "Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above. Put to death your rebellion!

Get rid of sexually immorality, lust, evil desires, and greed. Do away with anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language. Don't lie. Don't put people down, or be prejudice. Quit running after the desires of the flesh, and those of this world, and start running after a personal relationship with Jesus Christ! Set aside your rebellion, children! Do it now, before it's too late! And I, in turn, will set aside my wrath!"

You'd think we'd learn. More importantly, you'd think we'd heed the warning, and thus avoid destruction! But will we? Will we turn back to God, in time? Will America, will the Church, listen and repent before it's destroyed? Will we, personally, in our own current state of rebellion, discern what the Prophets are saying? Will we hear the "Lord of Love" inviting us Rebellious Children, inviting His Beloved Bride, back into His loving arms? Will we respond to that call in obedience, before it's too late! And all of God's People said, Amen!

PASTORAL PRAYER

We praise you Lord, and Worship you, and truly long to know you better. We sense you calling out to us, and reaching for our hands. We see you stirring in the world, and hear you whispering to us on the wind. You are speaking Lord. This we know. So, please, help us to listen. And as we do, lead us into a powerful and personal relationship with you!

Lord, we've come before you with our silent pleas and petitions. We've brought our prayers and our open hearts. Heal us, please, and comfort us. Strengthen us for the journeys that we are about to face. Awaken us to your Holy Spirit Father, who already resides within our hearts. And enlarge those hearts, so that there is room for even more of you! Expand our minds as well Lord, so that we can better understand your will and your ways. And then equip us, and encourage us, and push us even, to faithfully respond.

Lord, as your people, we pause now to thank you for calling out to us, even in the midst of our rebellion. We thank you for leading us into a personal relationship with you, and for using us to reach out to others in your Name. It is as your people Lord that we Worship you today. And as your people that we lift up before you those who need your Mighty Presence in their lives. So, we place before youWe have faith in you Lord, and we know that you will be present in their lives. We trust that you will grant to each of them, and to each of us, the things that we need most right now. So, with confidence, Father, we release these cares and concerns into your compassionate arms, praying together the prayer that your Son taught to us, saying...