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**“The Unrelenting Love of God”**  
**(Hosea 11:1-11):**  
**Pastor Peter Yi**  
**June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007**

**Introduction:**

**Introduction to the Minor Prophets.**

Today I am beginning a preaching series on the minor prophets. I had always wanted to tackle a series on this section of the bible, but was always apprehensive, due to my lack of knowledge on the subject. It's a difficult section because in order to properly understand it, we have to know a little bit about the history of Israel, especially during the times of the kings, and I stink at history. And if you recall reading when reading the Kings, after David and Solomon, it just seems to be an account of bad king after bad king; committing idolatry, leading their people astray and dishonoring God. And every once in a while you'd come across a half-way decent or really good king like Hezekiah or Josiah, but for the most part, they were pretty bad.

Adding to the confusion was the fact that the kingdom of Israel was divided. Under the rule of the first three Israelite kings, Saul, David and Solomon, the kingdom was united. All twelve tribes were under the rule of these kings, until after Solomon, where the kingdom was divided. Rehoboam became king of the Southern kingdom of Judah and Jeroboam I became king of the Northern kingdom Israel. And then the list of kings goes on from there.

And so when we get to the prophets who were mostly contemporaries of the kings, we have to ask two very important questions. First, to whom was the prophet speaking? Was it to Israel, the northern kingdom, to Judah the southern kingdom, or to both? Because they each had different, yet similar, and interlinked destinies.

The second question to ask when looking at the prophets is what time in history was the prophet living. This is important because of two important dates in the history of this divided nation. 722BC – which is the date of the the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel. 586BC – The fall of the southern kingdom Judah took place culminating with the fall of Jerusalem, which they thought could never happen, or rather, God would never allow to happen. But it did and off they were, led into exile into Babylon.

So it helps to know whether the prophet was writing pre-exile, during exile, or post-exile. So we have a prophet such as Hosea that was pre-exile, Daniel was exile, and then someone like Zechariah who was post-exile.

If I can give one more tip it's this. Read the prophets alongside the books of 1 and 2 Kings. It's just like reading Paul's letters alongside of Acts and the record of his missionary journey. So if the prophet says it was during the reign of this king and that king, we should flip over the kings and read what was going on at that time. So that's just a short background to the prophets.

Lastly, get a good study bible.

### Let's get on to the first prophet, Hosea.

Hosea was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom Israel, who lived during the mid 700s BC. We're talking about a little over 200 years after the glory years of David and Solomon. It was primarily during the reign of King Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14), who was one of the last kings of the northern kingdom. Let's quickly look at his account.

2 Kings 14:23-29 23 In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and he reigned forty-one years. 24 He did evil in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit. 25 He was the one who restored the boundaries of Israel from Lebo Hamath to the Sea of the Arabah, in accordance with the word of the LORD, the God of Israel, spoken through his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet from Gath Hopher. 26 The LORD had seen how bitterly everyone in Israel, whether slave or free, was suffering; there was no one to help them. 27 And since the LORD had not said he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Jehoash.

### Background to Hosea

The time of Jeroboam's reign was considered Israel's golden age. One commentator describes the socio-economic times like this. "It was a period of opulence, prosperity, opportunism, and scheming, during which the rich and powerful availed themselves of all opportunities to live luxuriously. The politicians and merchants in Samaria [Israel] improved their living standards, but the workers and farmers suffered poverty, hunger, and oppression. Israel was rotting from within." (Vangemeren 105)

Politically, Jeroboam was a great military commander but not much more than that. There had always been battles for boundary lines that moved in and out with the kings, but it was under Jeroboam that the boundaries of the kingdom had practically reached where they were during the time of David and Solomon.

Israel had become fat and proud and being economically prosperous only added to their arrogance. The social structure of the time encouraged power and greed, self-indulgence, corruption of justice, luxurious living among the upper class, with no sense of responsibility for the poor.

Religiously, they were still living in idolatry. They were worshipping the Canaanite god Baal. Sacred prostitution was being tolerated. Imagine next week you arrive at YN and it's turned into a brothel, and it's also part of the service. That's what they were doing at the temple of God. The priests of Israel had become corrupt and immoral. So both political and religious leaders were leading the people astray.

When I look at the times of Hosea and King Jeroboam, there's a parallelism with our times and our culture, wouldn't you agree?

We live in a time of perhaps unparalleled economic growth. The dollar is at one of its highest points. Traveling to America will finally be affordable. There's always been complaints about politicians and their policies, but really nothing really big or scandalous is happening (knock on wood). The wealthy are living well and the upper middle and middle class aren't doing too badly either. It's always the poor who are having a rough time. And are we as a society and as a church doing all we can do care for the poor?

And what about the nation if we were to evaluate it spiritually? Is it where it should be? Yes, I know we are multi-cultural society. And plurality of religions comes with freedom. That's absolutely true, but are we an ethical people, are we moral? Isn't Canada a country of idolaters who do not revere the name of the God of heaven? Isn't the church half-asleep? Now I don't want to paint a picture of doom and gloom, but let's realistically, from God's perspective, evaluate our country and ourselves. I think we could all use some improvement.

And so Hosea was God's spokesman to the last generation of Israel, prior to their fall in 722BC. The message that was given back then is also a message for us today. And his message was to respond to the unrelenting pursuit of the love of God by repenting.

### **Hosea's message**

Hosea's message of judgment was incredibly harsh. One of the basic messages was that Israel had become a prostitute. In the beginning of the book, we see God commanding Hosea to marry a promiscuous woman named Gomer, a woman who will cheat on him and find other lovers. Gomer becomes the analogy for Israel. Gomer. And Gomer has three children and God's tells Hosea to name them, "Bloodshed", "Not my People", and "Without Compassion". Which were words and phrases that described the people of Israel.

Throughout the Bible we see the marriage analogy. In the OT, it's God and Israel. In the NT it's Christ and the Church. When you think about this analogy, it's the only one which involves a covenant. Both our relationship to God and a relationship to man and wife involve a covenant relationship, so marriage becomes the perfect analogy for our relationship with God and vice-versa. In both of these relationships, there's a covenant of fidelity. We're agreeing that there will be no other suitors, no other competitors. And once the trust is broken, the marriage is fractured. And so that's why we call marriage a holy union. And our relationship with God is no less holy. There can be no other challengers and God will not accept any other lovers.

Think about this for a moment. If a man cheats on his wife and the wife says, "boys will be boys". Or "you can't blame him...hormones". If she doesn't raise a stink, if she's not outraged, if her heart's not broken, then something is fundamentally wrong with her, just as much as the adulterous husband. But I don't know if we allow that with God. We get a little perturbed with God's high and mighty, God only position. Maybe we'd rather say to God, "come on, give it a rest." And when we treat God like that, we truly cheapen grace and fundamentally misunderstand the person of God and our relationship with him. It's proper and right for God to burn with holy fire and passion for his people. I want a God that would go the distance to ensure I stay true to the relationship. And he has. He's given us his law. He's given us himself. He's covenanted himself fully to us. He's given us his own Son, so we can have a relationship with him. And he's implanted within us his Holy Spirit to make us holy. That's the God I want, and that's who God is.

Israel has rejected God and become an adulterous nation, forsaking the love of God.

And that's where we come upon chapter 11. It is perhaps one of the most gut-wrenching, visceral displays of God's love and his heart for his people. Let's take a closer look.

NIV Hosea 11:1 "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. 2 But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. 3 It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms; but they did not realize it was I who healed them. 4 I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love;

I lifted the yoke from their neck and bent down to feed them. 5 "Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because they refuse to repent? 6 Swords will flash in their cities, will destroy the bars of their gates and put an end to their plans. 7 My people are determined to turn from me. Even if they call to the Most High, he will by no means exalt them. 8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. 9 I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. 10 They will follow the LORD; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. 11 They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes," declares the LORD.

The breakdown of the passage.

- 1 – God's relationship to Israel. (Jesus the true Israel, the true Son)
- 2 – Israel's rebellion
- 3,4 – God's love and care.
- 5,6 – their punishment predicted
- 7 – the hardness of their hearts.
  
- 8-9 – God's passionate and unrelenting love for his people.
- 8 "How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, Israel?  
How can I treat you like Admah?  
How can I make you like Zeboiim?  
My heart is changed within me;  
all my compassion is aroused.
- 9 I will not carry out my fierce anger,  
nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim.

For I am God, and not man-- the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath.  
Line after line, eight times, God shares with us his heart and his covenant love with his people.  
It's a "don't make me do it" plea.

Ephraim, along with Manasseh was Joseph's two sons. There was no tribe named after him, but rather after his two sons. So Ephraim is just another name for Israel.  
Utter destruction will befall Israel. He compares the destruction to Admah and Zeboiim which were cities on the outskirts of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

10-11 – the remnant

This is incredible love of God that forgives the worst of sinners. This is the love of God that relents and delays his wrath so more people can come to him.  
This is the love of God that should come to mind when we read, "for God so loved the world..."

This love is not meant to feel all mushy and gushy and sentimental and warm inside and at the same time remain in our sin. Absolutely not. This love is meant to drive us to repentance, crying out, Lord, how could I have strayed from such a love as this. How could I have entertained idols and other loves, when I had your love? It's a love that drives us, draws us, into a deeper level of

obedience and commitment. It's a love that makes us aware of our surroundings and the plight of people and moves us to respond in caring for the poor and working for justice. This is the love of God.

Hosea was told to call his one child, "not my people" and the disciple Peter picks up the theme in 1 Peter chapter 2 and writes,  
1 Peter 2:9-10 9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Therein lies the promise. In Christ, we have become the people of God.

As we have a time of communion, let's prepare our hearts. Let's respond to the love of God. Folks, if God is calling us to repent, let's do it. If the love of God is calling on you to a deeper obedience, let's obey.

