

Series: Here Comes Heaven

Here Comes the Son

Sermon by Lead Pastor Paul Joslin

Hosea 11:1-4, Matthew 2:14-15

Waterstone Community Church, Littleton, Colorado

Sunday morning, December 22, 2024

Deb: A reading from the words of the prophet Hosea: “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son, but the more that they were called, the more that they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals, and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms, but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them,” Hosea eleven, one to four, the words of the Lord.

Paul: Thanks, Deb, for reading. All right, how many people are Christmas Eve present openers? Okay, a few of you guys. How many of you guys are Christmas morning, like you are purists? Like okay, and how many somewhere in between, you have like five Christmases with your family, and you do that thing? Okay, a few of you too, yeah. My family always, growing up, we could open one present Christmas Eve, I don’t even know. It was just like a little sample before Christmas, but we were not allowed to pick it, and it was always like the Christmas ornament that my grandma had gotten us or something, so it was like, “Oh cool, I got another Precious Moments Christmas ornament this year,” but that was our tradition. Christmas, in case you do not know and need a reminder, is three days away, so good luck to all of you who still need to go shopping with me this afternoon at Target. I hope I will see you out there, and maybe we won’t fight with one another in line, and we can maybe team up if we need to get some of those, but yeah, Christmas is coming up so quickly.

All right, another question for you as we get started today: how many of you are people who love murder mysteries, novels or books, puzzles? Okay, you guys like some of that, or maybe you’re a puzzle fan. You like putting things together and figuring things out. My wife is like that, and she loves those things. I can take them or leave them. I will do them with her. I wish I liked them though, you know what I mean, because I feel like everyone whom I know who likes to do puzzles is really smart, and so I wish I were that kind of person, but I’m not really, but my wife is, and for those of you who are still having some shopping to do, the people who just raised their hands, I just gave you a free idea of what you could get them for Christmas. You’re welcome for that, but here is why I bring that up: today’s passage that we just read from Hosea, and the prophecy that it is said to fulfill.

We have been in this series, Here Comes Heaven, and we have been looking at these Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, and most of them look forward, and they see on the horizon this hope that the people of God have that God will send his Messiah, a king, a son, Emmanuel, who will come and reign and rescue. Most of the prophecies we have looked at really fit seamlessly with the New Testament passage where you find them, and you can make a one-to-one correlation. They just really mesh, like a puzzle that fits together. If I am honest with you, the two passages we have today, it feels like when you are trying to put the puzzle together, you just cannot get the piece to fit with it. It doesn’t quite

just seamlessly line up, and before you think, “Wow, Paul, you sound like a heretic right now. Where are you going with this?” Let me just read the two passages that we have today.

So, one of them, this is the context in the New Testament that goes back to the passage that Deb just read to us from Hosea: Matthew two, fourteen through fifteen. This is talking about Joseph, Jesus’ Father: “So Joseph got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of king Herod, and so was fulfilled the prophecy that the Lord had said through the prophet, ‘Out of Egypt I called my son.’” Now on the face of it, this looks like a fairly normal prophecy. Joseph takes the child and Mary to Egypt to escape the oppression of king Herod, and Matthew as he is writing the gospel sees something here in this story that connects Jesus to an Old Testament prophecy found in Hosea. This is what it says in Hosea 11: “When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.” Now for you Bible scholars in the room, when you look at this, who is this verse talking about? “When Israel was a child,” who is that? So, say it a little louder for me. Jacob, yeah Jacob was the person Israel or the nation of Israel. “When the nation of Israel was a child, I loved him,” so is this talking about Jesus? No. All right, we’re doing really well so far, and then so when Israel, the nation of Israel, the people of Israel, Jacob’s descendants, when they were a child, “I loved them, and out of Egypt I called my son.” What story does that sound like? Exodus, right. Okay, you guys are two for two so far. You are really going to help solve this mystery today. So, this is talking in Hosea about the Exodus, which, is that in the future or in the past from the time Hosea is writing? The past, oh my gosh you guys are on it. You are even getting more fervor with each and every answer. This does not look like a prophecy at all. This looks like something from the past, the very beginning of the story, where God saw Israelites who were oppressed in Egypt and called out to them and brought them out of Egypt in the Exodus. That is what Hosea is talking about, and then Matthew somehow takes that story, looking back at the Exodus, and he says, “Yeah, Jesus fulfilled that,” which, I will be honest with you, all of my hermeneutics classes, which is just like a big fancy word for saying how you read the Bible in seminary, said, “Don’t do that.” Don’t take something in the past and make it to mean something that it did not mean to those people, and make it mean something different for today, but Matthew just like flippantly does that, and he applies a passage that has nothing to do with Jesus and says, “Yeah, I think I see Jesus this,” so what is going on?

This may not actually matter to you. You may think, “I don’t know, Paul. It is not a big deal to me. I do not care,” but to some people, this is a massive deal. In fact, I was reading a story this week, Craig Blomberg, who was one of my professors at Denver Seminary, about this very passage. He had a messianic Jew reach out to him, who said, “Hey, I have been reading. I believe in Jesus, but I came across this verse in Matthew two, fifteen, and then I went to Hosea, and I thought, “That is not a prophecy at all. That is not,” and it caused this crisis of faith for him, that, “Is the Bible just making up all of these prophecies? Do they actually predict that the Messiah would come, or are they just people reinterpreting things that were written in the past to try to apply it to the Messiah?” This is foundational stuff here, and so what we have to do today is unravel this mystery and see if we can get these puzzle pieces to fit together, because on the face of it, they do not seem to fit. It seems like Hosea is talking about the Exodus and Israel, and Matthew for some reason says, “Yeah, I can make that mean something about Jesus, and we will just put those two pieces together,” so we have to go to the context to see what this discrepancy is.

Let's first deal with the prophecy in Hosea. If you are familiar with Hosea's story, we don't have a ton of time to go into it, but you probably remember the high points. Hosea was a prophet called by God to marry a prostitute. It was not a great situation for him, because basically what God said is, "The people of Israel have been so unfaithful to me, they have been so rebellious, they have rejected my love, I want you to do this piece of performance art, Hosea, where you live out my story with the people in your own life, and so I want you to marry someone who is going to be continually unfaithful to you, just like the people of Israel have been unfaithful to me." Again, it is not a great situation for Hosea, but he chooses in obedience to follow God's leading, and he marries a prostitute, and then the rest of the book is a back-and-forth between Hosea's relationship with this woman and God's relationship with the people of Israel. In verse one of chapter eleven we get the prophecy, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." Again, really clearly not about Jesus. It is about the nation of Israel and the Exodus, but what goes on after that? In verse two, "But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals, and they burned incense to images." Now on the face of it, you can hear what God is talking about. I mean, it is very clear He is talking about the people of Israel's rebellion, their rejection, and their choice to not love Him the way that He has loved them. He says, "I loved you like you were my own child, and you have walked away from me. Again and again, and time after time, you have rejected me for other gods and other forms of worship."

Have you ever been there? Have you ever felt what God says He feels in this moment, where you have loved a child or a spouse or someone that you thought you wanted to spend the rest of your life with, and they were just completely uninterested in you? This is very relatable. Can you hear the heartbreak in God's voice in this passage? I want you to think, even more than a time when maybe you did not receive the love that you were looking for, to a time where maybe God's words here could have been said of you, a time in your life when God's love for you was not what you wanted, a time in your life when you chose to walk away, to reject God's will, to reject his love for you, to pursue something else. God is heartbroken in this moment, because He says He has loved the people of Israel like a child. They are prodigals who have run away from Him.

There are all sorts of ways that we fail to respond to God's love in our lives. The natural response would be gratitude and devotion to God, but so many times we turn away in moments of suffering rather than persevering and pursuing his presence. We value what the world offers more than a relationship with God. We believe that we can handle life on our own, without God. We turn to food and entertainment and substances to escape seeking God's peace and joy in our life. We turn away, and we reject Him, and for some of us, maybe it is not even like this open rejection. Maybe it is just that we are stuck in that place of half-hearted worship, where we go through a lot of the motions of following Jesus and do all of the Jesus stuff, but we have not given our heart to God. What is God's response to us in that moment when we have rejected Him?

Hosea goes on, and he says in verse three, "It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms, but they did not realize it was I who healed them," and he goes on to say, "I led them with cords of human kindness and with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them." Do you hear the intimacy in the imagery here?

My son Landon, he is about, well he actually just turned one last week, so good job by him, but he has been walking for a little bit, but if you have had a child or been around a young child, you know when you are trying to help them learn how to walk, and they are stumbling, and they like just walk around like little drunk people that do not really know what to do, and you have to take them by the hand and let them hold onto you, bend down to their level and make sure that they are stable and steady, so they do not fall. That is the image of what God has said He did for the people of Israel. He went down to their level, and as they were stumbling out of Egypt, as they began to lose their way and wander, He was like a father who bends down to teach his little child how to walk.

There is even more imagery in this passage around that same idea. He says that he takes them by the arms, but they did not realize that it was He who was healing them, and it is almost this imagery of as they are learning to walk, they stumble, they fall, they skin their knee, and God lifts them up and holds them when they are wounded, that He led them with cords of human kindness and ties of love. He was like a father who lifted a child up and set him against his cheek. You hear the intimacy. There is this through line and all these images of what God is trying to say to the people. He is like a father who bends down to the child. He is like a father who lifts the child up to Him. What he is talking about, is He is talking about getting on their level like any good parent does, not towering over them, but getting down into their space, and what is the context of a God who bends down like this, this rejection and rebellion and choosing to not love God back?

What we see in Hosea is the relentless love of a father. Hosea is looking back at all of these stories, and he is looking at the story of Israel from the time of the Exodus, when God brought them out of Egypt, and he is saying, "All along, you have been unfaithful. You have rejected God. You have chosen your own way, and you have chosen to reject his love, and yet God still bends down into your story and chooses to be with you. He is a God who gets on the level of his people." In this passage of Hosea, the image is that despite the rebellion and rejection of his love, God is a God who comes to them. I want you to hang on to that image, because it's beautiful, but let's be honest. What in the world does that have to do with the birth of Jesus and with Matthew two? Because if you remember the story of Matthew two, I am sure many of you are pretty familiar with the story of Matthew.

Even if you have never really been in the church before, you have probably heard bits and pieces of the story of how Jesus was born and the three wise men, the Magi, that came to visit Him. It all starts with a star that was in the night sky, and these wise men, and there were probably actually more than three, but we just say three because there were three gifts, they see this star, and they follow this star to the land of Judea, thinking and believing that this star is a symbol that a king has been born to the world, and so they show up to Judea. They go to Jerusalem, where the star has led them, and they go to the most natural place someone would go if they were looking for a king. They show up in the royal palace and king Herod's court, and as they walk into the court, they just announce, "Where is the king of the Jews who has been born? We have seen his star in the east and have come to worship Him."

King Herod, what we know about him is that he was an incredibly cruel and brutal ruler. I mean he was a tyrant and a dictator, and he would take people out if they were a threat to him, and he had no problem with imposing his injustice on others, so just imagine the courtroom scene for a moment. Herod is sitting up on his throne, these strangers from a foreign land appear, and they say, "Hey, where is the

king who has just been born?” and king Herod is sitting on his throne, thinking, “I am here, but I was not just born. I have not had a son. I do not know what you are talking about. This sounds like a threat,” and so he pulls aside all of his religious leaders and all of the scribes and Pharisees and all of the people who understand the prophecies, and he says, “Hey, remind me again, where was the king supposed to be born?” They say, “Bethlehem. He was supposed to be born in Bethlehem,” and Herod’s wheels start turning, and he is trying to think, “How do I find this child, a threat to my rule and to my reign?” and so he goes back to the Magi, and he says, “I think the child you are looking for is probably in Bethlehem. I just came up with that on my own. I figured it out, but that is probably where you need to go, but when you go, when you find this child, search for Him, and when you find Him, I want you to come back to me, so that I can worship Him too,” but it is all a ruse. It is Herod trying to get to this child, so he can take his life.

This is the point in the story, where if it were a TV show, it is like it ends on a cliffhanger. The Magi leave, and Herod gets this wicked smile on his face, and it is like, what is going to happen? The Magi find Jesus, and He is not in a palace. He is with his mother in a small house, and they give him these gifts, and they worship Him as if He is not just a king, but as if He is someone who should be worshipped. Then they are warned in a dream not to go back to Herod. It is as if God comes to them in a whisper and says, “Do not go back to this man. He has ill intent for this child. Go home another way,” so they trick Herod, and they leave a different way. Then Herod’s fear in that moment twists into fury, and when he realized he has been tricked and duped by the kings, by the wise men, he makes a decree. He says, “I can’t find the child, so I will just kill any child who fits the description,” so he gives orders to his soldiers to go to Bethlehem and take the life of any boy who is two years old or younger.

I told you I have a son who just turned one. It is not hard to imagine the weeping and wailing and heartbreak in that small little town, as Herod’s soldiers brutally and efficiently carried out his orders, and it is in that story that Matthew pulls back to Hosea and gives us that detail about what he thinks is going on, where he says in this story of this brokenness and evil and this oppressive king who has just taken the lives of potentially hundreds of little babies, and it gives us this detail: “So Joseph got up after he had been warned by an angel, and he took the child and his mother during the night, and he left for Egypt.” Do you do you see the imagery? Under the cover of night, they escape to try to go to a place of safety, and they leave for Egypt, “where they stayed until the death of Herod, and so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet, ‘out of Egypt I called my son.’”

What in the world do these two stories have to do with each other? On the one hand, we have the story of the relentless love of a father. On the other, we have a picture and an image of a story of intense brutality and injustice and evil permeating the world, and a small baby who is born into that world. What I think Matthew is doing and I think how that the puzzle pieces begin to fit together it is that Matthew is looking at the story of God and how God has been at work in the world, and he is looking at a world that has been full of suffering, disappointment, evil, and brokenness, and he sees a God who in those spaces continues to show up, and he sees in Jesus someone who is the epitome of God choosing to show up.

One of my favorite quotes about advent is from a woman named Fleming Rutledge. She says this: “The disappointment and brokenness, suffering and pain that characterize life in this present world is held in dynamic tension with the promise of future glory that is yet to come next. In that advent tension, the church lives its life.” Do you understand what she means by that? It is that we are stuck in the in-between

Christ's first coming and his eventual return, and it is in that tension that we see the brokenness of this world. We see rulers who are oppressive and unjust, and we see dictators like Herod. We see a world of brokenness and evil, and it is in that in-between space of the evil we see present now and the future glory that is our hope of restoration when Christ will return and set all things right, and what she says is we live in the tension between those two moments. I think what Matthew is saying is that Jesus lived in that tension too, that when he chose to enter into our world, God bending down to enter into our story of suffering and brokenness and evil, it did not take all of those things away. The very story of our Messiah coming into the world, the savior of our world did not suddenly just make everything okay. It happened in a place of evil and cruelty, and it is as if even though the Messiah has come, the world has still not changed, but God has not changed either, and He has always been a God who shows up in the heartache and the brokenness. In Hosea we see a God who continues to pursue his children even as they turn away from Him, and this is the same God who sent Jesus to pursue us. God's love is steadfast, unchanging, even when his children wander.

The point of Matthew, what I think he sees in the story of Jesus is that while Israel, God's son, failed to live up to all of the things that God had called him to, they failed to be obedient. They failed to fulfill the prophecies of what God had called the people to, Jesus is the one who fulfills this role perfectly. He is the true and faithful son who succeeds where Israel failed. His life embodies the complete trust and submission to his Father's will when none of us ever allow ourselves to go there. The Christmas story carries with it the shadow of the cross. Jesus' obedience not only fulfills Israel's story, but also stands in contrast to our own story with Jesus and with God. Where we rebel, He submits. Where we fail, Jesus triumphs.

I think that the answer to the puzzle of the prophecy is that Matthew sees in Jesus the fulfillment of the story God has been telling from the very beginning, a God who shows up and bends down to our level, even despite our rebellion and rejection of Him. That is the imagery of Hosea, and that is what Matthew wants his people to recall as they hear the story of Jesus, that Jesus is the same God who bends down into our story to rescue us and save us from a world of brokenness and heartache and suffering and evil. Is there a better image of the incarnation than what we see in Hosea? Is there any wonder why Matthew wants to pull that story together and to say this is a foreshadowing of who Jesus is and how he is the only fulfillment of the story? The good news of advent is not that we are faithful in our waiting. We are not, but that God is faithful in his coming, always. What do I mean by that? I mean that in the stories we just mentioned, there is a through line. There is a constant element to the story, where the people are continually rebellious and reject and disobedient and disobey, and in those stories, God continues to show up. God's heart for his children is one of a loving father who bends down to their level.

I want to ask you now pretty pointedly, is that the view have of God in your own life? Is that how you see God, as a God who bends down to your level even when you are disobedient, or when you reject his will, or you rebel against his love? How do you see God in those moments? What is your functional view of God in those spaces? Hosea says that even in rejection, God is someone who leads people with cords of love and human kindness, that He is a Father who bends down to our level. Is that your view of God? Is that the God that you believe in?

I think many of us would describe God, and we do not really have an understanding of this level of intimacy with Him. My guess is that if you think of your relationship with our Heavenly Father, it is one where you often think of God as judgmental or aloof or distant, especially in our moments of disobedience, especially in our moments of rejection and rebellion, but what Hosea and Matthew are saying is that in the story of Jesus, we have a God who shows up in those places, who comes down to our level in the incarnation, to save us not just from the suffering and evil and injustice of the world out there, but also from the very rejection that lives within our own hearts, that God's love extends all the way down to the deepest parts of ourselves that choose to reject Him, choose to rebel against Him again and again and again. I think what Matthew was trying to say and what Hosea is definitely trying to say is that when we recognize the depths of God's love, we see the tragedy in our rebellion. Like the story of Israel, we often turn away from God, and we chase idols of success or comfort or control, but God's love does not waver or falter when ours does. His kindness leads us to repentance, and Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of a God who has been down to our level.

So, as we close today, as we sit with this puzzle piece that hopefully fits together a little more than it did at the beginning of this story, I just wonder where in your life you are meeting the God who bends down to show up. Maybe there is a place in your life where you are seeing the suffering and the brokenness and the evil of this world right now, where you are not quite sure if God is with you or if He is for you, because of the circumstances of your life. My challenge to you in this space, in this moment would be to invite God into those spaces, to reveal Himself and how He is a God who is with you in those places, but I think there is a second element of the story that we have to wrestle with, and that is this, that sometimes in our life we go through seasons when we reject and rebel and do not live in accordance with God's will, and there are places in our lives where we have held some of ourselves back, where our hearts have been hardened to who God is and what He is doing in the world and what He has called us to do. There are parts of our lives where we are pursuing and thinking that if I could just have a little more of that, maybe that would satisfy the longing in my soul. We are looking to other things than the story of Jesus to fulfill us, and I think this story in Hosea where we are confronted with the depths of God's love, the depths of a God who bends down to our level, it is a call to repentance, to be honest about the places where we have chosen other things, other people, and other desires above God in our lives. It is a call to ask for forgiveness and seek forgiveness and repent of the ways that we have rejected a God who never stops loving us. I think when we understand the depths of God's love, then in that space of risk, that it feels like, "Can I step into that? Can I step into a place where I am completely honest about the areas of my life that I have held back from God?" Hosea wants us to have this image, Matthew wants us to have this image of Jesus and the Father as someone who bends down to our level, who heals our wounds and holds us close, even as we push Him away.

So, as we close today, I am going to leave and create a little space for you to have a conversation with God and allow the Holy Spirit to speak into your lives, because I do not know which place you find yourself in this Christmas season, the place where you are confronted with the circumstances of your life and the brokenness and evil of the world, and you are just wondering, "Is God there? Will He show up?" or if you are in a place where you recognize part of your story is that you have a hard heart towards Jesus

this season, that there are places in your life that you were holding back from Him and not living in submission to Him.

Here is the other element of the story. It is that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise. He is the Son who succeeds where we fail, so we do not have to live up to a certain standard. Jesus covered that. Will we be willing to turn to Him and repent? So, as we close, I am going to leave just a little bit of silence before the band comes out, to allow you to have a conversation with God about wherever you find yourself in this season. Where do you need the God who bends down this Christmas season, and where do you need to repent of the ways you may have rejected God's love this Christmas season?

If you would, please pray with me. Heavenly Father, I pray in this moment that by the power of your Spirit, you would speak to us. God, for those who find themselves in a season of longing, of waiting, of wondering how long it will be until the day of restoration, who look at the world and the circumstances of their life, and it is just easy to doubt and question if there is a God who is at work, God, I pray for them this reminder that we have in Hosea and Matthew of a God who is always at work, even when it looks like the puzzle doesn't fit together. God for those of us who are here this morning, and maybe there is a part of us that is only half-hearted in our pursuit of you, God if there is a place in our hearts or our souls where we feel far from you, where we feel like we have gone so far away that you could never welcome us back home, and for those who are here who just want to hold onto the things this world has to offer, so that when they hear a call to loosen their grip on the things of this world, they just tighten, God, I pray by the power of your Spirit for conviction in those areas. God, may we be a people of repentance. God may our repentance not come from guilt or from shame, but from this story of love of a Father who bends down to get on the level of his child, who lifts them up and holds them when they are wounded, who holds on all the more tightly when they push away. God may that be the narrative we have as we enter into this week of Christmas, the story of a God who bends down to our level, and may your Spirit speak to the places in our heart that are full of skepticism or disbelief about that story. God, may you breathe new life into our stories. May we choose to follow you more closely. It is in Christ's name that we pray, amen.

33:02 minutes

Edited by Tom Kenaston

Message #815