Sunday 24th July 2022

Hosea 1: 2-11 & Luke 11: 1-13

Father, Forgiveness and Furtherance

When we speak of God, introduce Him to people around us, what words do we use? Are these words what we believe God is like, or are they words that we have experienced God is like?

Take some examples perhaps. God is healer. Do we believe that God heals because we have read it or heard it – or have we experienced His healing either for ourselves or for others.

What about God is good. Is it just because we have read that many times in the bible so believe it to be true – or do we have examples in our own life where we have seen God’s goodness.

When we talk to other people, how much more passionate are we about things that we know through experience as opposed to simply having head knowledge?

When we read from the book of Hosea, at the outset of his prophetic ministry, God asked him to do something counter intuitive to most people – to marry a woman who was a harlot in the full sense of the word.

Hosea does not use the written word to expand upon his own biography though, he simply reports things to highlight the word of God. Through his own experience, he is able to speak the words of God far more passionately and heart-felt than if he was in a place of contentment, happiness and assurance.

When God was speaking through Hosea, it was at a time that Israel had been led by human kings for generations. Violence and idolatry were rife. The people were seeking provision for their needs either from other gods, that are no gods at all, or else building alliances with other nations.

In all their actions they had turned from God.

This first paragraph of Hosea, reporting his marriage to a harlot, who gave herself to anyone, who looked for security from other means, who did not give her whole self to only him was a reflection of how Israel had turned from God.

His wife then bore him a son, and he was to be called Jezreel. For us, that may not seem a particularly emotive name; but it translates to “God scatters”. We can see the prophetic implication to that name, but it was more than that.

Jezreel was a place and it had been the scene of much bloodshed. Naboth was killed there by Ahab and Jezebel so that they could steal his vineyard. It was also the place of retribution when Jehu had killed Jezebel and Ahab’s descendants, as well as other battles.

It would be a bit like a French family calling their child “Waterloo”. Again, we are making this quite impersonal. Just for a moment, think of a place that has brought you much pain and injustice. How would you feel if you named your child that place and had the memory every time you called them?

Is this the feeling that God would have when calling to Israel?

We are then told of a daughter who was to be called Lo-Ruhamah. In this translation the meaning is given as “unloved”, which in honesty I have a problem with. In another commentary that I read it used the translation “unpitied” which sits better with me.

Calling the names of the children should evoke a feeling that could be shared with God. Even though in the text there is nothing to confirm whether the child is Hosea’s or not, if he is involved with raising her I think “unloved” is too strong – and I personally believe that God has, and will always love His creation.

Unpitied for me still evokes a turning away, a removal of His presence to an extent. But what meaning you believe is for you to decide – but either way it would be a constant reminder that you have removed yourself from the close relationship with Father.

Finally Hosea reports another son, called Lo-Ammi, which translates to “not my people”. Put yourself in the place of Hosea, calling out to this boy, publicly declaring that he is not mine.

It would be a constant reminder of the family that you would have desired – all the things that would be considered right.

Hosea was living the experiences of God. Through the book there is pain and separation – with attempts at reconciliation.

The way the Israelites had removed themselves from a pure relationship with God, trusting and honouring only Him, was being lived out with the adulterous wife. As Hosea tried to reconcile with his wife, Gomer, so had God tried to reconcile with Israel all through the generations. It was Israel that turned their backs on God and not God turning from them.

So, as we move forward a few hundred years to the gospel of Luke, had things changed?

If we move forward to the present day, how is the Christian church of God faring?

When the disciples asked how to pray, the model that Jesus gave them is still as relevant for us today. It is a good reminder to come back to a simple calling to Jesus.

What is in the model of the prayer. Father, hallowed by Your name. It has been proven all through time that we do need to be reminded to keep the name of God holy. To remind ourselves of His sovereignty.

Your kingdom come. That is a reminder of His goodness and we should reflect on how we can help that kingdom to come, through our words and actions.

Give us each day our daily bread. Reminding us to rely on Him only for provisions. Not just food, but all our needs.

Forgiveness – both for ourselves and for us to give to others. Acknowledging that we can approach Jesus just as we are. We cannot become clean by our own actions, we need to ask Him.

And lead us not into temptation. Temptation has been around since the beginning of creation. Humankind continually falls to it. But just saying those words does not mean that we are magically exempt from doing so now.

The parable after it re-enforces that. The friend that knocks on the door at an inconvenient time, shows boldness, trust and reliance that their friend will help them. That is the basis of our prayer, persistent and consistent. To expect an answer. This is the practice of our prayer, the part that we should play.

The response of the friend who gives is the part that God plays in prayer. He will give what is needed.

When Luke speaks about the Father giving good things, that is the character of God. Not everyone will have experienced a good Father, so as always this analogy can break down as it assumes that people will naturally read it through the lens of what a Father should be at a bare minimum level. But we need to keep in mind that may not always be the case.

In the scenario given in Hosea, he looked after those children. That is the Fatherhood that is being reflected in the bible.

Despite the naming of the children, a reminder of Jezreel, the girl called unpitied and the youngest called not my people – the last part of the chapter shows that God still is interested in every single one of the Israelites, the nation will continue to grow and He promises that they will be called “children of the living God”. There will be reunion and reconciliation.

In the passage it states that Judah will be shown God’s love and saving grace by the Lord their God. In the passage in Luke it culminates with the promise that those praying and asking for provision and deliverance will receive the Holy Spirit.

That is still the way that God acts now. He remains today as our heavenly Father, who will give us all that we need. He will continue to forgive us if we turn to Him.

But we are just the same as all those who have preceded us, we will err, doubt and stray.

Hold on to the truth of God that you know, and better yet all things of God you have experienced.

God is our Father and will act as the perfect Father, from a place of love. He will not act from a response of whether we deserve something, but His response will be from His love for us.

In both the Hosea and Luke passages we see people turning away from God, but we are shown His forgiveness. And we live in a generation that knows how deep that Fatherly forgiveness was willing to go – willing to die on a cross for each and every one of us.

As we pray, try to change our attitude from doing all that we can FOR Him and rather bringing all that we are UNDER His authority. Just take a moment to let that sink in. Rather than doing all we can FOR Him – which is limited and placing trust in ourselves, change it to bringing all we are UNDER His authority. With the help of the Holy Spirit that is so much more than the first option.

As we place all that we are under His authority and allow the Holy Spirit to reign over us, our relationship with God will grow and will further our experience of Him.

The Lord’s prayer acknowledges Father, Forgiveness and shows a desire for the Furtherance of God’s kingdom.