

Between Chapters – The Prophets

Message to the Northern Kingdom – Hosea

22 August 2010

Rachel and the family went away last week after her father's funeral; we had some good family time away. On Sunday afternoon we drove back to Johannesburg for work etc. the next day but did not make it home that night.

We broke down about 20km from Delmas, about 100km from home. You know when you are driving and you can start to imagine being home, stretching your legs, getting your active boys out of the car so that they can run around. That is what I was thinking about just before the warning lights came on and the car started making a clank, clank, clank noise.

I get out the car open the bonnet and discover that the fan belt has snapped. After a while, trying to get hold of our insurance company we realise that we are close to Delmas and the Campus outreach camp site so we phone them on the off chance that someone is there. They are there and they send a rescue vehicle out to save us but the rescue bakkie breaks down. It is getting dark, we are on the side of the freeway and our two young children are in the car with us. The rescue vehicle is also broken down and I am frustrated.

I am asking God what did I do wrong, am I being punished? I just want to get home. The 2nd rescue vehicle for the 1st rescue vehicle arrives towing the bakkie, we get a towing company in to tow our vehicle and then get into the 2nd rescue vehicle. That is not the end of the story though, the tow rope keeps breaking between the two cars so we have to crawl along, it is getting late what more can go wrong...God what have I done wrong?

It is funny how we can so easily forget about the nature and character of God at times like this. This should have been a terrible experience, but at some point I turned around and noticed that Rachel and the boys were having a ball. They were treating this like an adventure, it was an adventure. We got to stay in a really nice place thanks to friends (Neal & Jenifer) we were fed well and got to spend some time with people that we would not normally have had time for.

Corne drove through on Monday to take us home...extra time, good friends, lots of family time and some adventure thrown in. All in all it was a gift but it could so easily have been seen as a curse - it depends on is your understanding of God. Is He a loving father who works all things for the good of those who love Him or is He a vengeful, begrudging God out to smite us for our disobedience?

- Last week Steve brought us to the end of the chapter in our story of God and us. He took us through the history of the kings. The kingdom of Israel is divided - a series of bad kings in the northern kingdom that eventually led to the destruction of Israel by Assyria.
- The next chapter of this story is called Uproot and Replant which looks at the exile of the 2 Southern tribes (Judah) and their return to the land. However, before we get into that chapter we need to look at the build up to The Exile between chapters so for the next 4 weeks we are between chapters. Or we are in the build up to chapter 5, Uproot & Replant.

- I want to introduce the prophets at this stage – God has used prophets throughout this story. Last week Steve talked about Elijah & Elisha. Up until this point though the prophets have been weaved into the story but from the 8th century BC, the prophets started writing their messages down so we have the introduction of prophetic literature into our story.
- This week we are looking at a message to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. (Hosea, Amos)
- Next week is a message to the nations (Jonah)
- Then for 2 weeks - a message to the Southern Kingdom part 1 & 2 (Isaiah)
- As we have been following the story in the book of kings, we see an overlap of prophetic input.
- The prophets were God's voice to His people and leaders...their main message was to call Israel back into a covenant relationship with God.
- In the story that Steve completed last week was a king in the North – Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14) ...**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.**
- In his reign Israel did quite well in that they had regained their borders, the people were fairly wealthy.
- In that time 2 prophets were raised up to bring the nation back into a relationship with God.
- Hosea & Amos – the messages are simple turn back to God, follow his laws and he will bless Israel or don't follow God and be judged by your own actions (destruction).
- The messages are difficult to read and can leave you with some doubt about God's loving nature.
- I am focusing on Hosea this morning with some input from Amos...lets read a few of these prophecies:
 - A whirlwind will sweep them away, and their sacrifices will bring them shame.
 - For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them.
 - Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed like lightning upon you.
 - ...they make idols for themselves to their own destruction.
 - Now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins: They will return to Egypt.
 - The people of Samaria must bear their guilt, because they have rebelled against their God. They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open."
- It seems harsh, we can sometimes read these scriptures without a full understanding of what is going on and get confused about the heart/nature of God.

- Let's look at what has been happening in Israel for centuries now; they have set up Baal worship, they are sacrificing children to other Gods, the poor are oppressed and the needy are crushed, justice is denied to the outcast, Israel is as bad as the nations around them – and they do these things in the name of God.
- God has been patient with His people...He has even caused them to prosper in this time.
- Hosea comes with a very interesting message to a nation blessed by God. The same nation turns away from God and continues to do evil in His sight.
- God loves His people so much that He is willing to take them back, to love them, to nurture them and care for them even though they continue to reject Him.
- This is the message of Hosea...God asks Hosea to marry a prostitute, one who is unfaithful to him. To look after their children even though some of the children are not his (children of unfaithfulness) God asks Hosea to take his wife back again even when she has left him for another man...not just take her back but love her.
- God asks Hosea to do this to show Israel what He is doing for them.
- In our story of God and us we have been looking at the people (us) in the story but the prophets help us understand the story from God's perspective.
- Let's look at some of the things that God says to Israel that help us understand their destruction better: **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. 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 message of Amos ends like this: "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be..."
- Hosea ends like this: ¹ Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God. Your sins have been your downfall! ² Take words with you and return to the LORD. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. ³ Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. We will never again say 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made, for in you the fatherless find compassion." ⁴ "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely..."

- When we read Hosea & Amos with an understanding of the context and an understand that God is good we learn things about our God that should stir our faith, align our hearts and encourage us to run after him. Trust Him, follow his ways and love Him. This is what I understand about God our father after reading these two books in the context of our story and I pray that it stirs you to faith in Him:
 - **God is a God who saves** – Israel has completely turned away from God. For the past 200 years and 13 kings Israel has continued to live in the sin of Jeroboam the 1st king of the northern kingdom. Remember during Solomon’s reign God comes to Jeroboam and says that if he walks in Gods ways, follows Gods laws and decrees then God will build him a dynasty that will endure (1 Kings 11:38-39). When Jeroboam comes to power though, he establishes 2 places for Idol worship and all the kings after him follow in this practice. The nation have rebelled against God all this time - but in Jeroboam II’s reign God sees how badly people are suffering in Israel and because no one can help them God stretches out His hand and saves them.
 - Most of us have experienced that – we pent part or most of our lives opposing God but when we turn to Him He saves us... This message shows me that God wants to save, He is both able and willing and all He asks is that we follow Him.
 - **God is a God who speaks** to His people – He calls, He warns, He leads, He shows the way, He warns again, He describes the consequences of our actions, He shows us the consequences. God does not leave His people in the dark...
 - Sometimes we think God is punishing us for something...but God always says what He is going to do before He does it. Sometimes God speaks but He is not saying what we want to hear so we don’t hear Him. This seems to be the case in Israel because Gods message was clear but no one seemed to listen.
 - **God is patient** – we have been following this story for thousands of years now and God is still talking about Israel being His Child, loving His son out of Egypt. God has been patient with His people for so long they continue to get it wrong and He does not give up on them.
 - How long have you been alive? How long have you been following Jesus? We are so fickle sometimes and we can tend to put our fickleness onto God...I think God is tired of me, God will leave me, God is not with me. But God has been doing this for a long time and has endured a lot worse than what you think you have done...
 - **God is merciful**...how many times has God turned his anger away from Israel. In the life of Hosea God shows how His mercy works, He gets Hosea to love his unfaithful wife and rear her children. God turns His anger away from Israel because He is God – not man, the Holy One among us. Hosea 6:6 God says that He requires mercy not sacrifice, Jesus repeats this phrase in Matthew 9:13 & 12:7. Jesus says after that phrase... “For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”
 - **God is just**...most of the difficult to read parts of this message involve God’s judgement. I pick up 2 things in this prophecy about God’s judgement. The 1st is that it is certain...God will judge, the 2nd is that it is profoundly fair. Gods judgment aims at restoring, He will continue to put up with us as long as there is hope that we will restore life to the way it was intended to be. Shalom between God and man.

"In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be..." Revelation 21:5...⁵He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"

- **God is love...** God says to Hosea; Love her as the lord loves the Israelites. Why would the creator of the universe, God who can do anything continue a relationship with people who continually choose to walk away from Him? Because He loves His people beyond anything we can comprehend. Have you ever loved someone who does not love you in return – it hurts. Imagine persevering in that love for thousands of years.



How is it possible for people to keep resisting God, how is it possible that God is not loved by all people all the time.

I think it is because the people who are meant to represent God to the world have a poor understanding of Him.

We live how we choose, often we do it in the name of God but do we help those who can't help themselves, are we patient, do we show mercy, does our justice bring peace and wholeness and do we love people even when they continue to wrong us.

It is a tall order but we have been given the tools to do it (The Holy Spirit), we have been shown how to do it (Jesus) and have been given the grace to get it wrong. We have been given the opportunity to live the most adventurous life, the most fulfilling life. A life that brings God to life for those around us to see.