

The Love that Came Down at Christmas (Hosea 11:1-4 & John 3:16-21)

21-Dec-25

Hosea 11:1-4

"When Israel was a child, I loved him,
and out of Egypt I called my son.

² But the more they were called,
the more they went away 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.

To them I was like one who lifts
a little child to the cheek,
and I bent down to feed them.

John 3:16-21

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

There's a **sermon outline** for you to take **notes**.

Let me **pray** first. Let's pray...

Intro/Love

In our **two Bible readings** this morning we see **God's love**.

Before we look at what **God's love** looks like

It's worth us considering what we mean by love – as human beings

You see - we can use the word love in lots of different ways

I love my wife – I love my family – I love my church family - I love my cat/dog – I love my football team – I love pizza – chocolate – hot chips and so on...

When we are talking about loving things rather than people – we should perhaps use a different word than “love”

But what do we mean by “**love**”?

Here's some possibilities

- Love could mean a feeling of **attraction** or **affection** or even an **infatuation** or even **lust**!
- Or our love might be conditional upon how the other person behaves towards us
 - Actress Elizabeth Taylor was married 7 times
 - Actress and socialite Zsa Zsa Gabor was married 9 times – her view of love was very cynical – she once said “***I want a man who's kind and understanding. Is that too much to ask of a millionaire?***” and she also said “***I have learned that it's not diamonds that are a girl's best friend but divorce lawyers!***”
- Our love might be self-focused – I love someone because of how they make me feel

- Our love might be temporary or changeable – and shaped by our **mood**, our **emotions**, our **circumstances** or the **performance of the other person**
 - For example, someone loves their spouse – until poverty comes through the door and then love flies out the window!
 - Or someone loves their spouse because they are so intelligent, wise and fun loving - but then their spouse becomes disabled or has a long chronic illness or gets depression or dementia – then they stop loving them!
 - Or someone loves their parents because their parents are so caring – but what if their parents are not so caring – do they still love them? The 5th commandment says “honour your father and mother” – it doesn’t say only if they are nice!
 - Or we love our children (young or grown up) because we are so proud of them – but what if they make really bad ungodly choices and we’re not so proud of them anymore – do we stop loving them then?

As we can see “love” is difficult to define and love can be very wishy washy and inconsistent – in the modern vernacular – human love can be flaky to say the least!

Thankfully in Greek – which is the original language the New Testament (NT) part of the Bible was written in – there are different Greek words for love with different helpful meanings...

[Slide-5 Greek Words]

1. **Agápē (ἀγάπη)** – *A Self-giving, sacrificial love*

The love God shows towards humanity; it's everlasting, sacrificial and unconditional love (e.g. John 3:16).

2. **Phília (φιλία)** – *Friendship love*

Affection, loyalty, and mutual care between friends or companions (e.g. John 15:13–15). Philadelphia = brotherly love!

3. **Érōs (ἔρως)** – *Romantic or passionate or erotic love*

This word is not used in the New Testament

4. **Storgē (στοργή)** – *Family love or natural affection – often described as a “comfortable old shoe” love*

Used only in Romans 12:10, [philostorgoi] – meaning devoted to one another.

5. **Philautía (φιλαυτία)** – *Self-love*

Can be a healthy self-care or an unhealthy selfishness; often it is negative in the Bible (e.g. 2 Timothy 3:2) – loving ourselves too much!

In the Bible - God's love is mostly described as agape love – a sacrificial love – that keeps on loving, no matter what!

So let's look at **God's love for Israel** from our Old Testament (OT) reading – please turn to **Hosea 11:1-4**

God's Love for Israel (Hosea 11:1-4)

[Slide-Heading]

The context of the book of Hosea is:

God commanded the prophet **Hosea** to go and **marry** a woman called **Gomer**, who is described as **unfaithful** – she is a promiscuous and an adulterous woman. Not surprisingly, Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea and left him for other lovers and fell into disrepute. However, God told **Hosea to go and take Gomer back – even though she was unfaithful – and Hosea did take her back** - even paying to buy her back!

Hosea's marriage is a **vivid picture** of **God's relationship with His people Israel** – where **God** is the loving faithful **husband** who loves, pursues and restores **His unfaithful wife - Israel**.

As we pick up the story in Hosea chapter 11 -we see **God's love for Israel**

Verse 1 – God's love is like a **parent**: he loved Israel as a child and rescued them from slavery and mistreatment in Egypt.

But - **Verse 2** – God's love is **rejected and He grieves for His people**: the more God called Israel back to Him, the more they turned away from Him - to worship false gods (Baals)

Yet - **Verse 3** – God's love is **patient and nurturing**: like a parent teaching a child to walk and like a parent healing a child's wounds. Likewise God is still patient even when His child (Israel) doesn't realize it's actually God Himself who is helping them!

And - **Verse 4** – God’s love is **gentle, tender, and compassionate**: He leads His people - not with force - but with kindness. And we have this lovely picture in v4 of God lifting Israel, His child, to His cheek [like we would lift a newborn baby to our face and love their cuteness and smell) and then there is the lovely picture of God stooping down to feed His child. It’s a beautiful tender picture of God’s love. He comes close to where we are - He is not a distant uncaring God – but an up close and personal loving God!

[Slide-God’s love]

To sum up - God’s Love in Hosea then – is:

- **God doing the Initiating** – God loved first – He made the first move! (v.1)
- **God’s love is Patient** – He keeps calling even when rejected (v.2)
- **God’s love is Nurturing** – he teaches, heals, and carries His people along (v.3)
- **God’s love is Gentle** – he leads with kindness, not by force or coercion (v.4)

Application:

We are like Israel...

We are loved deeply by God – but we are prone to wander from Him and disobey Him!

Even when God has carried us, healed us and gently led us, we often fail to recognize His kindness and sometimes we think we’ve achieved everything in our own strength – and don’t realize it was God who got us through!

Like Hosea's wife Gomer – we might look for love in all the wrong places.

Perhaps we should also ask ourselves what or who do we turn to – in times of trouble - instead of turning to our first love - God – the One who has always loved us, cared for us and has always been carrying us?

In this passage from Hosea – there's also a nice link to the Christmas Story

If we look at verse 1 again – we see God looks back in time and says, “*When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son.*” That verse is a loving memory of God rescuing His people from **Egypt**, treating Israel like a beloved child. But in the NT - Matthew tells us that after Jesus' birth, Jesus' earthly Father, Joseph, was warned in a dream by an angel that King Herod was looking to kill baby Jesus and the angel told Joseph to take Mary and Jesus to **Egypt** until it was safe and that's what Joseph did – and Mary, Joseph and Jesus stayed in Egypt until King Herod died. Then God again – through an angel - **called his Son, Jesus, out of Egypt** when it was safe (Matthew 2:15). Matthew is showing us that Jesus steps into Israel's story. Where God's Son, Israel, was called out of Egypt and later on was unfaithful and turned away from God; this time - Jesus comes out of Egypt as **God's faithful Son** who lives in perfect trust and obedience to the God the Father.

And that brings us nicely to our NT passage from John 3:16-21

Because the same God who loved his son Israel is the same **God who loved the WORLD** and sent His Only Son, Jesus.

[Please turn to John 3:16-21...](#)

And let's look at **God's Love for the World!**

God's Love for the World (John 3:16-21)

[Slide-v16]

Starting at v16 – one of the most famous verses in the Bible – which clearly defines what Christmas is all about...

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

The word for ***loved*** – is that Greek word – ***agape*** – we mentioned earlier – it is a ***sacrificial love*** and it's ***unconditional***. God loved the world despite its fallenness and brokenness and sinfulness – He still loved the world – and sacrificially He **gave** – His only Son – Jesus.

We could say - well that was easy for God – He gave up His Son but He knew His Son would rise from the dead again. But God allowed His Son Jesus to leave the glory of Heaven – to enter this dark sinful broken world – to be misunderstood – to be rejected – to be mistreated – to suffer terribly – to be crucified – to take upon Himself **the sin of the WHOLE world** – and then God the Father turned His face away from Jesus - and forsook Him – that's awful – ALL because God sacrificially loved this whole world – not just Israel!

Although **God's love is unconditional – being saved IS conditional**. The verse also says – ***whoever BELIEVES in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life.***

People are only saved by believing in Jesus!

Believing here - is not just believing an historical fact that Jesus came to this earth and died on a cruel cross. But rather believing is - **believing personally** that He died for **MY** sins and **I'm** genuinely sorry for **MY** sins – and **I'm** accepting His death forgives **MY** sins – and also believing He rose from the dead so **I** too can rise from the dead, so **I** can have eternal life in Heaven.

[Slide-V17/18]

And notice v17 – the **goal** of God's love – God didn't send Jesus to condemn us as guilty of our sin but to **SAVE us for Heaven**

And notice in v18 – the goal of God's love is for us to **believe in Jesus** so that we are **not condemned**. Believing in Jesus' death on the cross for our sins – means we are **declared innocent** – instead of being declared guilty. Jesus takes our punishment and we are **declared righteous** – right with God and approved by God!

A.W. Tozer [American pastor/author] says "*The only sin Jesus ever had was ours and the only righteousness we can ever have is His*"

As Christians – it's like - when God looks at us – He doesn't see our sin - He sees Jesus standing in front of us – and all is well!

[Slide-v19-21]

V19 goes on to say – that the Light has come into the world – that light is Jesus - Jesus is the Light of the World [John 8:12]. Jesus - the Light has come into the world, but many people want to stay in the dark – they are not interested in pleasing God – they just want to continue pleasing themselves! And besides the

darkness hides their wrong doings – whereas as v20 goes onto say – if they come into the light of Jesus - the Light exposes their evil deeds.

You see when people are told about Jesus – the Light of the World – they are not always willing to let go of their “old” life – they might have sinful behaviours they just can’t let go of. Things like:

- **pride and self-sufficiency** – not wanting to admit their weaknesses or to admit their sin
- They might be holding on to **bitterness or unforgiveness**
- They might have **secret habits** that they are ashamed of
- Or they are **dishonest** or **greedy** or **materialistic**
- Or they might **misuse their power and control**
- Or they **seek to please others rather than God!**
- Or they might be caught up in **some sexual sin or addiction** – that they refuse to get help for!

The sad thing is - if people were simply to come out of their dark lives and come into the light of Jesus – as v21 says

They would then be people who live by the truth - who have stepped into the light of Jesus, so it becomes clear to everyone watching on, that their lives are now transformed by the Holy Spirit. And it means they are now following Jesus’ way – not their own way.

God’s love here in John 3:16-21 **presents a solution to sin and presents a solution to the punishment for sin – which is death.**

That solution is Jesus

[Slide-Contrasts]

And **these verses present several clear contrasts**

- A contrast between – not believing in Jesus or believing
- A contrast between – perishing or having eternal life
- A contrast between – being condemned or saved
- A contrast between – a dark world or the light of the world
- A contrast between – living a lie or living the truth in Jesus
- A contrast between – Hell or Heaven

Notice – these contracts – don't give the option to sit on the fence!

These verses tell us WHY God the Father sent His Son Jesus to this world – and that is because **God loved the world** – and - **He wanted people to have the opportunity to be saved for Heaven.**

[Slide-Q1]

But there are **a few questions** we might still want to ask?

Q. Why couldn't God just ignore our sin?

A. Well – God can't do that because He is *Holy, Holy, Holy* (Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8) and *God cannot look at sin – His eyes are too pure to look at sin* - (Habakkuk 1:13) and *sin must be punished* (Genesis 2:16-17; Isaiah 59:2; Romans 6:23)

[Slide-Q2]

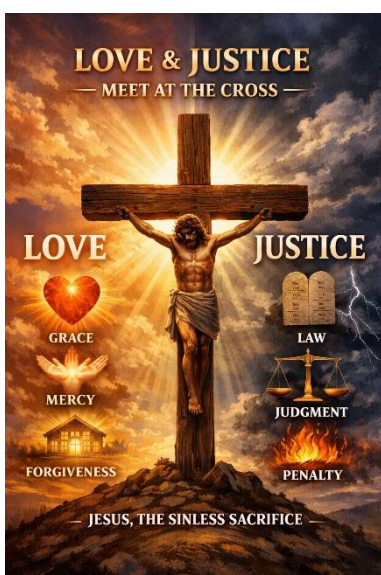
Q. In that case then - why couldn't God just say – *“okay – the world is dark and sinful – I've had a gutful – I'll simply abandon the world!”*

A. God can't do that either because His love is not flaky like human love – and besides **He made promises in the OT that He would send a Saviour to fix the problem of sin and death** (Gen 3:15; 12:1-3; Psalm 103:3-4; Psalm 16:10; Isaiah 25:8; 53:5-6; Daniel 12:2; Ezekiel 36:25-26). And so, God had to give up His Son - to keep His promises/prophecies and to maintain His integrity as a God who ALWAYS keeps His promises!

[Slide-Love and Justice]

Q. We may then ask - how is possible for Jesus' death on the cross to save us?

A. The answer is – even though we are all sinful – and God is holy and just and cannot ignore our sin - and even though sin must be judged and punished, and even though God's justice must be satisfied. The Good News is, God's Son, Jesus, is **sinless** and He **willingly left Heaven** to **take the punishment we deserve**. He is our **substitute**.



On the cross, **God's love and God's justice meet**. Jesus, the perfect and sinless Son, bears the penalty for our sins. **His death satisfies God's justice** while still showing **God's amazing love**, so that anyone who trusts in Jesus is forgiven and given eternal life.

Jesus pays the penalty for us breaking God's law – and we receive **Grace** – **Mercy** – and **Forgiveness**!

(pause)

If we just pause for a moment and think about the fact that - **all** our sins that have been put on Him and we walk away free – that's crazy isn't it?

Then think about the fact that Jesus has **the sins of the whole world** put on Him – that's just mind blowing – isn't it?

(pause)

Our Response to God's Love at Christmas

On that **first Christmas** – **God's love came down to us!**

And **the enormity of God's love and the enormity of Jesus' sacrifice - requires a response from us!**

- If we haven't already – we must acknowledge we have sinned against God – and genuinely **repent** – and **say sorry to God**
- Then **believe that Jesus sacrificially died for us** – so we could be forgiven
- We must then surely **thank God – every day - for sending Jesus** – by **worshipping** God and His Son
- We must then **receive Jesus as the Light of the World**

- And then **walk in His light** – by trusting Jesus and obeying Him – and **live lives that please God** – not lives that please ourselves or others!
- And we then **reflect Jesus' love** to others in our daily lives
- And we **share the Good News** that God's love came down to us at Christmas

[Slide-Gift?]

One final thought – we are a few days away from Christmas now – a time when we share gifts – what gift of love [that **agape love – sacrificial selfless love**] will you give Jesus, this Christmas, as a way of thanking Him for what He has done for you?

Let's pray...

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the love that came down at Christmas, a love that pursued us even when we turned away. As You called Your Son out of Egypt and sent Him to save the world, remind us today of the depth of Your mercy and the gift of eternal life through Jesus. Help us to live in Your light, to share Your love, and to trust that nothing can separate us from You. May our hearts respond in wonder, praise, and obedience.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Benediction (Romans 12:1)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Amen.