

WHAT DOES GOD'S LOVE DO TO YOU?

HOSEA 14:1-9

Once, a farmer who had experienced several bad years of farming in a row went to see the manager of his bank. He said, "I've got some good news and some bad news to tell you. Which would you like to hear first?" The banker replied, "Why don't you tell me the bad news first and get it over with." "Okay," said the farmer. "With the bad drought, inflation and all, I won't be able to pay anything on my mortgage this year principal or interest." "Well, that is pretty bad," said the banker. "It gets worse," said the farmer. "I won't be able to pay anything on the loan for the machinery I bought principal or interest." "Wow, is that ever bad!" observed the banker. "It's worse than that," said the farmer. "You remember I also borrowed money from you to buy seeds and fertilizer and other supplies. Well, I can't make any payments on that loan either principal or interest!" "That's awful and that's enough," said the banker. "Tell me what the good news is." "The good news," replied the farmer with a smile "is that I fully intend to keep on doing business with you!"

Isn't it completely amazing that in spite of the fact that you and I are spiritually bankrupt before a perfect God, He keeps on doing business with us? If that's true for us today, it was just as true for the prophet Hosea in his day. You may recall that the nation of Israel divided into two countries after the death of King Solomon. The southern nation was called Judah while the northern nation retained the name of Israel. Hosea lived in Israel some 750 years before Jesus in a time when the northern nation was probably at her most powerful and prestigious. It was militarily strong, governmentally stable and economically sound. But in the most important area of all, Israel was morally and spiritually bankrupt – overwhelmed with corruption and widespread idolatry.

"Faith in a Minor Key" is the name of this message series. It's a look into a section of the Bible called the Minor Prophets – the last twelve books of the Old Testament. It's an often neglected, unread and unstudied part of God's Word. Today, I want you to read and think with me about the last chapter of Hosea. Sometimes people think the Old Testament has little or nothing to say about God's grace or God's love. They need to read the book of Hosea. And Hosea's experience of God's grace and God's love finds a climax in the last chapter. Let's read it now. That chapter answers a question I want to ask today, "What does God's love do to you?" First of all, think with me about...

WHAT DOES GOD'S LOVE PROMPTS IN YOU.

First of all, God's love prompts in you an awareness of sin. That might sound strange and kind of negative until we understand where God's coming from. The Bible does say, "If you don't confess your sins, you will be a failure. But God will be merciful if you confess your sins and give them up." (Prov. 28:13 CEV) Sin has awful consequences as Hosea warns, "Return, O Israel, to the LORD our God, for your sins have brought you down." (Hos 14:1 NLT). Being aware of

your sin means beginning to understand how God feels about sin – my sin, your sin, all sin. Hosea gained that kind of understanding in a very painful and personal way. He married a woman named Gomer who was unfaithful to him and abandoned Hosea and their children. Hosea lived with the awful pain of knowing his spouse was sharing her body with other men. God loved the people of Israel like you might love your spouse. Israel had become spiritually unfaithful to God by going after other gods. Hosea came to understand through his painful personal ordeal that the nation's spiritual adultery was as painful to God as Gomer's physical adultery was to Hosea.

When you start to avoid sin because you realize how much it hurts or offends your Father in Heaven, you're becoming aware of sin in an ultimately positive way. One way God loves you is to make you aware of the terrible results of your own sin: failure, collapse, ruin, immense hurt to others and yourself. The wages of sin is death and God in His love must make you aware of what can destroy and kill you spiritually. A hiker was watching a magnificent golden eagle flying and soaring high in the sky. But suddenly something went terribly wrong. The eagle began to fall and before long it lay at the hiker's feet in a broken, lifeless mass. What on earth had happened? No, it hadn't been shot by anyone. Bewildered, the hiker went over and examined the bird. Still curled up in the eagle's talons was a little weasel that the now dead eagle had planned to eat. As the eagle had drawn that little weasel up close to its body while flying, it was unaware that the weasel had wormed itself partly out of its grip. The weasel bit into the breast of that eagle and sucked out its blood killing it. That's what sin will do to you if you're unaware of it. It will flat out kill you eventually.

But God's love does far more than just make you aware of sin. Awareness is supposed to lead you to confess and turn away from sin. The favorite Old Testament word for repentance is right there in v. 1: "Return, O Israel, to the LORD our God, for your sins have brought you down." The biblical idea implies movement. You've been walking away from God – that's sin of some kind. Repentance means a change in your direction – you return to the Lord. You stop, you turn around or you turn back. You turn away from what displeases God and turn towards whatever is His will or purpose for your life. Repentance never means just feeling sorry for what you've done. It means to stop committing the sin. An elementary school janitor tells a story about the same teacher who would ask him for the same favor on the same day every year. Without fail, on the night of "Open House" every fall, she would ask the janitor if she could store all her junk in his closet just for that night. She didn't want the parents and school officials to see all of the stuff she hadn't bothered to file, organize or throw away for the past twenty years. So on the afternoon of "Open House" she and the janitor would carry all of her junk to his closet. But her attempt at cleanliness and order were an illusion. The next day they'd carry it all back to her classroom. That's too often how we live our lives spiritually. We don't understand that repentance always means a profound and lasting change of behavior.

When you first received Jesus as your Savior, you confessed your sins and repented in a kind of general way. That's fine. But confession and repentance isn't something you do once – when you start your Christian life. It's a continual part of a healthy Christian lifestyle. Please notice two important aspects of true confession here in Hosea 14. First of all, true confession is verbal. "Take words with you and return to the LORD...." (Hos 14:2 NIV) Just coming before the Lord with a vague feeling that you made some kind of mistake isn't enough. Use words to make an accurate and sincere confession before the Lord.

Secondly, true confession is specific. Learn to reject that all too easy tendency just to confess your sins generally and avoid confessing them specifically. You don't sin generally; you sin specifically. If you lied, call it a lie. If you gossiped, call it gossip. If you lusted, call it lust. If you despised a poor person, call it pride. God wants you to be specific about whatever it is you're confessing. This is what Hosea encourages the people of Israel to do. "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. Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. (*Israel had been guilty of trusting in the power of other nations to protect it rather than trusting in God's power.*) We will never again say "Our gods" to what our own hands have made (*Israel had been worshipping other gods*)....'" (Hos 14:2-3 NIV) Specific sin – and every sin you commit is specific - demands specific confession.

God's love prompts an awareness of sin in you. It prompts you to confess and turn away from it. Thirdly, it prompts you to have confidence in God's grace to forgive you fully. In yourself, it's hard to believe God's grace is big enough to forgive all of your sins. So the Holy Spirit comes alongside of you and gives you the confidence to approach God and ask for His mercy. The rest of Hosea 14 assures Israel that God can and will forgive their sin. The Bible also says, "So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." (Heb 4:16 NLT) What does God's love do to you? It prompts and it also provides.

WHAT GOD'S LOVE PROVIDES TO YOU.

God's love provides, first of all, full forgiveness. Verse 14:4 (NLT) may be the most wonderful verse in the whole book of Hosea: "The LORD says, 'Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever.'" That's an interesting choice of words – "heal you of your faithlessness." Sin is sometimes depicted as a spiritual disease that God alone can heal. Another prophet, Isaiah, (who lived around the same time as Hosea) said this about the Messiah, "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." (Is 53:5 NIV) Through the suffering of Jesus at the cross you were given a thorough and instantaneous cure over this spiritual cancer called sin. Because of Jesus, God's judgment of your sin was turned

away from you and you received forgiveness. The Bible says, “But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness... Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away.” (1 John 1:9; Acts 3:19 NLT)

God’s love provides, secondly, full acceptance. Consider Hosea 14:4 (NLT) again: “The LORD says, ‘Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever.’” In the Old Testament, God is described as the majestic God, the powerful God, the great God. But in Hosea, the chief attribute of God is the fact that He’s the loving God. What can you learn about the way God loves you from the book of Hosea? Do you remember Gomer, Hosea’s unfaithful wife? Hosea describes how she hit rock bottom after leaving him. Her lovers ended up rejecting her. Since she had no means of support, she sold herself as a slave. It was at the slave auction that Hosea found her. He paid the money and bought her. But he didn’t keep her as a slave. Instead, he restored her to her position as his wife. That’s how much Hosea loved this undeserving woman. She no longer had any claim on his love. Hosea owed her nothing. In fact, there were many reasons for Hosea not to love Gomer. But Hosea decided to love her, nevertheless. That’s an incredible picture of what full acceptance looks like. Like God Himself, Hosea’s love knew no bounds. Hosea loved Gomer freely.

That’s how God loved Israel – freely. That’s also how God loves you and me – freely. Think about that word “freely” for a minute. You’ve never done anything to deserve or earn God’s love for you. You paid no price to acquire it. Why, you didn’t even seek God’s love. God, in His love, sought you. God has no reason to love you. He chooses to love you. Do you love your children “freely”? Not really. There’s a good reason to love your kids – they’re your own flesh and blood! They belong to you. You come to love other people who over time have treated you in loving ways. To some extent, they have earned or deserve your love. Your love for them isn’t really “free” either, is it?

The only reason you seek God is because God first sought you. The only reason you pray, confess your sins and try to live a life pleasing to the Lord is because the Holy Spirit is right there gently pushing you in that direction. But God doesn’t accept you because you seek Him, pray to Him or even cry tears of repentance before Him. God’s grace or God’s love doesn’t come to you just because you ask God for it. God provides you with His love because He loves you freely. God doesn’t love you because Jesus died for your sins; Jesus died for your sins because God’s already loved you. All of that means this: God’s great love for you finds its source in Himself not in you.

Here’s something about God’s love that’s both humbling and wonderful. First of all, there’s nothing in you to attract God’s love. That’s kind of humbling, but it’s true. If you think there is anything in you yourself that somehow merits God’s acceptance, you have an overinflated view of yourself and a microscopic view of

God and His holiness. You just don't get it! By the same token, it's just as true that, secondly, there's nothing in you to prevent God's love. That's good news, isn't it? The Bible is full of deeply flawed people who committed all sorts of terrible sins, but God loved and forgave their sins. Is there any pit you're in this morning that God's love is not deeper still? Is there anything in your past God's love can't forgive and wash away? Or, let's suppose you accepted Jesus as your Savior, began an earnest attempt to live a Christian life, but then something happened. Maybe you slipped into a sinful lifestyle. Perhaps a multitude of difficulties and problems in life left you disappointed with God. You might even feel very distant from God this morning. All I can say is that if Jesus ever loved you, He will never stop loving you. God's love provides full acceptance

The rest of this chapter – Hosea 14 – goes on to explain what else God's love provides to you. Notice that it provides full abundance. That's the whole point of this agricultural or nature imagery in v. 5-8 (NLT): "I will be to Israel like a refreshing dew from heaven." No rain falls in Palestine, apparently, from May through October. The only moisture plants receive, then, is from the early morning dew. God's love is like that – it's the only spiritual reality that truly brings relief to your parched life and mine. "Israel will blossom like the lily." That speaks of beauty. Sin will make you ugly. But God's love has the ability to bring beauty back into your life. "It will send roots deep into the soil like the cedars in Lebanon." That speaks of strength and inner stability. Sin makes you weak. But God's love makes you strong and stable "Its branches will spread out like beautiful olive trees." Olive oil was as precious in Hosea's day as crude oil is in our day. Sin robs your life of value and usefulness. God's love restores that value and usefulness. Israel will be "as fragrant as the cedars of Lebanon." Sin has a way of making you offensive to yourself and others. Call it spiritual body odor. When you live in God's love, however, there's something wonderfully fragrant about your life. You give off a wonderful spiritual scent. I think of that verse over in the New Testament that says, "Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God...." (2 Cor 2:15 NLT)

Hosea just stacks image upon image upon image to drive his point home. "My people will again live under my shade. They will flourish like grain and blossom like grapevines. They will be as fragrant as the wines of Lebanon. I am like a tree that is always green; all your fruit comes from me." So what is the point? God is all about abundance. Life. Fullness. "Overflowingness." So what does God's love provide to you? Full forgiveness. Full acceptance. Full abundance.

Father Jim was in charge of an orphanage. Father Jim was the most loving, caring man anyone who knew him had ever met. All the children in the orphanage loved him. Even after they'd grown up and left to establish homes of their own, they'd come back to visit him. The most wonderful thing about Father Jim was the ability he had for accepting in each child the very thing the child hated or most wished could be different about himself or herself. If a child had unruly hair, Father Jim made it seem like her hair was the most beautiful hair of

all. If he had big feet, so that other kids teased him when he tried to run and got entangled in them, Father Jim praised those feet until they became objects of pride. After awhile, all the other children wanted big feet, too!

One day when Father Jim was in town shopping, a new child was brought to the orphanage. It was a little boy with a very ugly, very noticeable birthmark that covered half of his face. It was really quite a repelling sight. Apparently, the boy had developed a disposition to go along with the birthmark. He screamed and cursed at the social worker who brought him to the orphanage. All the children wondered how Father Jim was going to respond to this new kid! Surely, Father Jim had met his match! Surely, he wouldn't be able to find anything good to praise in this boy.

That afternoon when Father Jim's battered old van turned into the drive, the kids were all there to greet him. They wanted to observe his first encounter with this new child. He stood off by himself, defiant of everyone and everything. Father Jim got out of the van with his usual jovialness. There was shouting and hugging as he greeted each child. Then they all grew silent and stood aside as he noticed the new boy. "Hello and who is this?" said Father Jim. "It's the new boy," one of the children said. "Well, well, well," said Father Jim as he approached the boy. The children stared wondering what Father Jim would do when he caught sight of that hideous birthmark. They never forgot what they saw next.

"Here we go," said Father Jim merrily as he scooped up the boy. And then he planted a great big kiss right in the middle of that horrible birthmark. He hugged the boy tightly and set him down. The boy soon became a model child. The other children accepted his birthmark as if it were something special given by God. After all, Father Jim had kissed it and that made it beautiful.

God's love is like that. Yes, it prompts certain things in you and me: an awareness of sin, confessing and turning away from sin, and the confidence to believe God's grace is bigger than our sin. God's love also provides certain things to us. Full forgiveness. Full acceptance. Full abundance. God in His grace even kisses the parts of you that you yourself despise. That's what God's love does to you and in you.