**Hosea 11 – February 20**

The old hymn “And Can It Be” written by Charles Wesley is one of my favorites. The second half of verse 1 says, *“Died He for me, who caused His pain? For me, who Him to death pursued? Amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God should die for me?”* This truth still wows me, bids me come, and shames me. The shame because I am embarrassed at times with the life I live in light of the life He gave to save mine. Wowed and wooed (drawn to Him) because I can’t get over the depth, height, and extent of His love. This is what chapter 11 of Hosea is about.

This chapter begins much like the others in the book of Hosea. We read of Israel’s negligence towards God and unbridled sin. Yet, we read of God’s faithfulness and passion for His people. We read of a love that causes Him to say, “How can I give you up? How can I surrender you? My heart is turned over within, all my compassions are kindled” (v.6). Friends, this is for a people who have spurned Him, rejected Him, and loved other gods before Him. How can it be, that Thou my God could love me this way?

We are reminded in verse 1 of a portion of Israel’s history. It was God who loved her first and called her out of bondage. It was God who taught her to walk by faith and who held her in His arms and brought healing (v. 3). God was the One who led them and appointed men (Moses, Joshua, et al.) to be His ambassador for them. It was God who condescended to them and provided their sustenance (v. 4). In all of this – they went after other gods (v.2). Now, a truth that is hard for some of us to accept is that God can genuinely love in this way, and still discipline us severely. The reason behind His discipline is His love. Hebrews 12:6-10 says in part, “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines…God deals with you as with sons…*He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.”* His holiness, His character will not allow Him to wink at our sin nor leave us in a state of sinfulness. We cannot enjoy the pleasures of His Kingdom while we remain willfully engaged in sin. So, He does what He must to drive it out of us.

Look at verse 7 where it sums up the attitude and lifestyle of His people – “So My people are bent on turning from Me.” This is what He is facing with them and yet His heart’s cry is – “How can I give you up?” They deserve the punishment that Admah and Zeboiim received. These two cities were destroyed with Sodom and Gomorrah. This is what Israel deserves and yet God loves them so much that He simply cannot do this to them. Instead, He extends grace and mercy. This is of course grace and mercy that is not cheap. The result of this unbelievable measure of love will be that they will, first, be spared and secondly will eventually walk in a manner that is pleasing and right with the Lord.

My mind has thought often as we have journeyed through the book of Hosea of all that was lost by God’s people unnecessarily. Then I wonder what you and I have lost because of failure to obey, to trust, to pursue, or simply to love the Lord with all of our heart, mind, and strength. Oh, that today God would give us a thirst for Him that supersedes all other thirst in our lives. May we hunger for Him like never before. Think today on His amazing love and ask yourself, “How can it be that He loves me so much?