

Hosea 11:12-13:16

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[0:00] Genesis, firstly, in chapter 25, and then in chapter 28, and then in chapter 32.

! And why we're having these readings, these three readings from the book of Genesis should become clear! when we turn to the prophecy of Hosea. So first of all, Genesis chapter 25, and we're going to read verses 19 to 34.

This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac. Abraham became the father of Isaac, and Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, the Aramean from Paddan Aram, and sister of Laban, the Aramean. Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife because she was barren.

The Lord answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, Why is this happening to me? So she went to inquire of the Lord. The Lord said to her, Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated. One people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger.

[1:37] When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment, so they named him Esau.

After this, his brother came out with his hand grasping Esau's heel, so he was named Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when Rebekah gave birth to them. The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents.

Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob. Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country famished.

He said to Jacob, Quick, let me have some of that red stew. I'm famished. This is why he was also called Edom. Jacob replied, First, sell me your birthright. Look, I'm about to die, Esau said. What good is the birthright to me? But Jacob said, Swear to me first. So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright. Now over to chapter 28 of Genesis, and at verse 10, still reading about Jacob.

[3:33] Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haram. And when he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, Lord. And he said, I am the Lord, the God of your father, Abraham, and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until you have done what I've promised you. When Jacob woke from his sleep, he thought, surely the Lord is in this place, and I was not aware of it. He was afraid and said, how awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. And then over to chapter 32, and at verse 22, and we're still reading and thinking about Jacob.

Jacob. That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. And after he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. When the man saw, that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip, so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. Then the man said, let me go for its daybreak. But Jacob replied, I will not let you go unless you bless me. And the man asked him, what is your name?

Jacob, he answered.

Then the man said, your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome. Now then, let's turn over to Hosea.

And the lengthy passage that you've maybe read for today is chapter 11 and verse 12 to chapter 13 and verse 16. But what we're going to do this morning, in fact, is we're not going to study the whole of this chapter. We're not going to do an expository sweep through the whole chapter. We are just going to look at a very small section of it. And in reading this, you'll understand why we've been looking at the story of Jacob. So chapter 11 of Hosea at verse 12.

Ephraim has surrounded me with lies. The house of Israel with deceit. And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One. Ephraim feeds on the wind. He pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence. He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt.

[7:58] The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah. He will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds. Now here at verse 3, we're reading about what we've just been reading in the book of Genesis. In the womb, Jacob grasped his brother's heel. As a man, he struggled with God. He struggled with the angel and overcame him. He wept and begged for his favor.

He found him at Bethel and talked with him there. The Lord God Almighty, the Lord is his name of renown.

But you must return to your God. Maintain love and justice and wait for your God always.

Now, as we continue in our studies here in the prophecy of Hosea, I would invite you to turn with me there into the passage which we read together just a little while ago. Not the whole of chapters 12 and 13, which is the section for this morning, but rather just these seven verses. These seven verses from verse 12 at the end of chapter 11 to verse 6 of chapter 12. How do you sum up the teaching of this book, encapsulating all that we've learned in it so far in its first 11 chapters?

It was a phone call I will never forget. It was from a young married girl who I knew well.

[10:16] She and her husband were very much in love, or so I thought, because she was phoning me to tell me that earlier that week he had come home from work to tell her that he no longer loved her.

And then he went and he packed his bags and he left the house. And he was never to return. And as I say, I'll never forget that phone call because as she told me of this, and it was totally unexpected, she just sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

So much so that I really did think that her tears would come dripping out of the handset. Quite simply, she was completely and overwhelmingly heartbroken.

The pain, the pain, the hurt, the trauma. It was indescribable. And nothing that I could say could in any way mend, heal that broken heart.

Hosea has been called, he's been described as the prophet of the broken heart. And you'll recall his story if you've been with us over these past weeks, of how he was told to, by God, to marry Gomer.

[12:00] Chapter 1 and verse 2, an adulterous wife. And it's not just that Gomer adulterated herself, it's that she prostituted herself.

She sold her body for money. Now, why did God tell Hosea to do such an extraordinary thing?

And the answer is to illustrate what it meant to God when the people of Israel rejected him, left him to follow after other gods, false gods, in that the living God, the God who had bound himself, committed himself to them, as in a marriage, was no longer their first love.

Like that young married man, saying to his wife, who simply adored him, I don't love you anymore. I'm leaving.

You see, the terrible, the awful thing about this is that it not only breaks the law of God. Exodus 20 and verse 3, you shall have no other gods before me.

[13:26] You see, who is God in your life? This is really the big question of this book. It not only breaks the law of God, it breaks the heart of God.

And in telling Hosea to marry a woman like Gomer, God was saying to Hosea, I not only need you to learn this, I not only need you to know this, I need you to experience this, I need you to feel this, this brokenheartedness, in that this is what my people's adultery, their backsliding does to me.

It simply breaks my heart. And so we might sum up the teaching of these 11 chapters in this threefold way, in that first of all, sin breaks the heart of God.

What we've just been underlining. And so remember Jesus arriving in Jerusalem at the beginning of Passion Week. And the Jews wanted nothing to do with him.

And of how he wept over it. Such was the pain. Such was the anguish of his broken heart.

[15 : 00] Can I just pause here for a moment to add this? That the hearts of pastors can often be broken.

Utterly broken. Not least when they invest themselves in people. Giving of themselves to people.

And then these people turn away and reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it breaks a pastor's heart. Sin breaks the heart of God. And then secondly, sin brings the judgment of God.

And the judgment here in these days was so very, very terrible in that it was the withdrawal of his presence from amongst his people.

Chapter 5 and verse 6. When they go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, they will not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them.

[16 : 11] And you remember how Jesus himself experienced this on the cross for our sake, in bearing our sin, as he cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

But of course, and this is the wonderful thing about this prophecy. This is the wonderful, wonderful thing about its teaching.

In that all the way through it, there is a message of hope. In that not only does sin break the heart of God, and not only does sin bring the judgment of God, thirdly, sin arouses the grace of God.

That is the undeserved love of God to sinners such as you and me. And this is what we were thinking about last time in chapter 11.

There at verse 7, My people are determined to turn from me. Now, what do you expect God to say?

[17 : 23] Well, that's just fine by me. Good riddance to bad rubbish. Oh no, oh no. And here is grace.

Amazing grace. Abounding grace. Verse 8, How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Adma?

How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me. All my compassion is aroused.

And so what's the message of Hosea? Well, we've been singing about it this morning, haven't we?

It's simply this, that God is a God of covenant faithfulness.

That is, having bound himself, having committed himself to us in the gospel to be our God. He will never, ever let us go.

[18 : 37] And this is underlined for us in this section, in these two chapters, as we are given three examples of this faithfulness being worked out in the lives of three Old Testament figures.

Jacob, Moses, and Saul. Now, in the time that we've left this morning, let me just focus on one of these three figures.

Jacob. In that if ever there was a man who was undeserving of God's covenant grace, then it was him.

You'll find his story in Genesis 25 to 35. There's some afternoon reading for you. But look at the context here to all that's said about Jacob.

And it's the sin of both Israel and Judah. Material, financial, and political sin.

[19 : 43] Chapter 11 and verse 12. Ephraim has surrounded me with lies. The house of Israel with deceit.

And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One. Ephraim feeds on the wind.

He pursues the east wind all day and multiplies lies and violence.

He makes a treaty with Assyria and sends olive oil to Egypt. And so, verse 2. And this is what Israel and Judah deserved.

The Lord has a charge to bring against Judah. He will punish Jacob according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds.

Now this judgment did come. It did come. But what was it? In the light of what they deserved, what was it that they were offered?

[20 : 51] What was held out to them by God? And the answer is grace. Grace. The grace of God God in his covenant faithfulness illustrated for us here so very wonderfully so in the story of Jacob.

And let me point out to you the key elements of this from four episodes in his life. In that what we see here is firstly God's overruling grace.

Secondly, God's descending grace. Thirdly, God's transforming grace. And fourthly, God's providing grace.

First of all, the overruling grace of God. And just to warn you that we'll spend most of our time on this first point.

And this begins in the life of Jacob before he was even born. Do you see how Hosea mentions this in verse 3?

[22 : 12] In the womb, he grasped his brother's heel. Now, this is a reference to Genesis 25 and verse 24, describing the birth of twin boys to Isaac and Rebekah.

When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment, so they named him Esau.

After this, his brother came out with his hand grasping Esau's heel, so he was named Jacob. That is heel grasper.

And the picture that I have in my mind is that of these two boys in Rebekah's womb. And as Esau's about to be born, Jacob takes hold of his heel.

And he says, no you don't. I'm going to be first out. I'm going to be first out. And you see, here was the boy who became the man who was never going to play second fiddle to his brother.

[23 : 28] No, he was always going to be first, the preeminent one, the bigger one, the stronger one. And the point is, he was prepared to go to any lengths to be this.

This is why it's interesting that he was given the name Jacob. Because the Hebrew root of this word means literally deceiver.

Deceiver. And he lived out his name in that he lied and he cheated his way to being this, to being first, to being number one.

And two particular incidents are recorded for us of him doing just this. In that firstly, there is how he manipulated his brother.

Now we read about this earlier on in Genesis 25 of how Esau came home one day having been out hunting and he was weary, he was famished.

[24 : 36] And when he came into the kitchen, Jacob had just finished making this fabulous stew and smelling the aroma of it. He said to Jacob, I'm dying of hunger, give me some of your stew.

And what does cool, cunning, seeming Jacob say? What's it worth? Is it worth your birthright? Now the birthright always belonged to the firstborn son and it concerned both material and spiritual blessings.

Well, you can see Esau thinking to himself, I don't really care about the birthright. What's that to me? And so he says to Jacob, the birthright's yours.

Just give me some of your stew. And swearing an oath, the deed was done. And Jacob got what he wanted. Now, in time, Esau came to realize just how important the birthright really was and assumed that sooner or later all of its blessings would come to him when his father died.

And so not just how he manipulated his brother, secondly, there is how he deceived his father. Now, this is in Genesis 27.

[25 : 54] We didn't read this part of the story. You read it later. And it tells us that when Isaac was old and he was coming to the end of his life, the time came for him to pass on all the blessings of the birthright to the firstborn son, to Esau.

But because he was blind, Jacob was able to convince him, trick him into believing that he was Esau. And so all the blessings, material, financial, and spiritual, were passed on to him.

And once the deed was done, it was done. And when Esau came home to find out what had happened, he was incandescent.

He was furious. And he said, Genesis 27 and verse 36, isn't he rightly called Jacob? He's deceived me these two times.

He took my birthright and now he's taken my blessing. Just to note here that when God in his word wants to describe the complete and the utter sinfulness of the human heart, the visual illustration which he uses is that of Jacob.

[27 : 24] Jeremiah 17 and verse 9 is perhaps the key verse. The heart is deceitful, above all things and beyond cure.

And the word which God uses in speaking about the heart being deceitful is Jacob. Says God, the heart is like Jacob.

Now, what a thing to say. imagine me preaching on sin and saying, let me tell you what sin is like.

In fact, let me show you what sin is like. And I point at someone here in church. Now, I need to be careful where I'm pointing. Okay, perhaps that's the best way.

But, you know, see him. See her. That's what sin's like. You want to know what sin's like? What a thing to say.

[28:33] And yet, this is the man that God came to in his sovereign grace. And to press this home and underline this point even more, just how great and special this grace, this love of God towards Jacob was.

We read Paul's words in Romans chapter 9. And he takes us back to the story of Jacob and Esau. And Paul quotes Malachi 1 and verse 2.

Jacob I have loved. But Esau I have hated. Now, this phrase Esau I have hated is hyperbole.

You know what hyperbole is from your English classes at school. It's making a point by the use of exaggeration. And so, remember how Jesus used this figure of speech in Luke 14 and verse 26.

If anyone comes to me and doesn't hate his father and mother, he cannot be my disciple. You see, what God is saying is so very great as my special love for Jacob that my every other thought of and feeling towards Esau can only be described in comparison as hatred.

[30:12] Now, you might find that somewhat hard and difficult to grasp and understand. But do you know what I find harder? Much harder?

not Esau I have hated, but Jacob I have loved. Oh, it's incredible, isn't it?

Jacob, the cheat, the liar, the thief, I have loved. And the point is, my friends, this is the gospel.

Oh, the most astonishing thing in all the world is that as Christians, we can, as men and women whose hearts are altogether deceitful like Jacob's, we can put our names alongside Jacob's.

And so, fill here. Now, this really is astonishing. And just how astonishing you would fully realize if you could see into my heart, right into my heart.

[31:26] When we were in Ullapool, there was a lady in my congregation. She was an alcoholic who had been wonderfully, wonderfully converted. Her name was Morag.

And Morag came from the island of Lewis. And I was sitting with Morag in her home one day, and she looked at me and she said, you know, Mr. Hare, I could never imagine you ever doing anything wrong.

Really, Morag, I said? Do you really mean that? Now, what did I say to her? Well, you know exactly what I said to her. You need to speak to my wife.

But it's astonishing, isn't it? Put your own name here, Phil here. I have loved. And how do we know that God is such a God of grace that he loves those who are so undeserving of his love?

Well, in the words of the hymn inscribed upon the cross, we see in shining letters, God is love.

[32:41] So, that's the first thing. The overruling grace of God. But then, and much more briefly, and secondly, the descending grace of God.

Now, here in this biography of Jacob, Bethel is mentioned. Do you see it in verse 4? He found him at Bethel and talked with him there.

Now, God came to Jacob, appeared and spoke to him at Bethel on two occasions. Let me make mention of the first, because it was when he was fleeing for his life from Esau, having stolen the birthright blessing from him, and tired and weary he was cast down.

Everything had worked out so very badly. He lay down to sleep and he had a dream. The dreams in Genesis 28, we read it earlier.

And it was that of a stairway reaching up to heaven, with the angels going up and down on the stairway. Now, what was the stairway illustrative of?

[33:55] What was the meaning of this dream? Well, here he was, and probably thinking that God would have nothing more to do with him, and God was saying, the nature of my grace, the nature of my grace, is that it comes down from heaven to where you are.

It's not that you have to somehow climb up to me. That's what all the world's religions are about.

Finding your way up to God, which is simply impossible because as we sang at the beginning of our service, God is a holy God.

It's not that you have to come up to me, it's that I have come down to you. How does Paul put it?

You see, what we have here could well be described as the gospel ladder or the gospel staircase. 2 Corinthians 8 and verse 9, For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, coming down from heaven to the cross, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

And here the words of the hymn beneath the cross of Jesus come to mind. We sang it last Sunday evening round at Castle Road.

[35:35] Oh, safe and happy shelter, oh, refuge tried and sweet, oh, tristing place where heaven's love and heaven's justice meet, as to the holy patriarch Jacob, as to the holy patriarch, that wondrous dream was given, so is my Savior by the cross a ladder up to heaven.

And so Jacob said when he woke up, this is the very gate of heaven. You see, this is the gospel. grace coming down. So you have overruling grace, you have descending grace, and then thirdly, do you notice, you have the transforming grace of God.

Verse 3 here in Hosea 12, as a man he struggled with God, he struggled with the angel and overcame him, he wept and begged for his favor.

Now this is Genesis 32, and more than 20 years have gone by, and Jacob's coming home, but he knows he loved to meet up with his big brother, and on the way, and he's on his own at this point, we're told that he met a man who, verse 24, wrestled with him till daybreak.

[37:17] It's a somewhat strange incident at first reading. When I was a wee boy, I would often go to visit my granny here on a Saturday afternoon, and at four o'clock we would sit down to watch the wrestling on ITV.

If you're old enough, this says something about you, if you can remember the wrestling on ITV at four o'clock on a Saturday afternoon, I remember it well, the commentator was a man by the name of Kent Walton, but the bouts of wrestling were very short, four rounds of three minutes each, but this wrestling bout went on all night, and what was it about?

What was this angel doing? And the angel was the angel of the Lord. In other words, this was Jesus. This was Jesus.

What this angel was doing was bringing Jacob to that point after all these years in a spiritual wilderness of complete surrender and submission to God.

But why then does it say here in verse 4 that Jacob struggled with the angel and overcame him?

Well, when you read the account of this wrestling match, we're told that Jacob held on to the angel and said, I will not let you go unless you bless me.

[38:56] The point being, you see, just how much did he really want God and the blessings of God in his life?

love. And the answer was finally, finally, more than anything else in all the wide world.

You see, he knew he couldn't do without God, without Jesus. He said, I'm not going to let you go until you bless me.

God and I wonder if there's someone here this morning and that you've been wrestling with God, or rather, God has been wrestling with you and he's been bringing you to that point of complete surrender and submission.

And as it were, this morning, you're clinging on to him for dear life. You're clinging on to him for dear life. More than anything else in all the world, you know that you need him.

[40:08] You can't do without him. Well, Jacob was transformed and the evidence of this was that God changed his name.

Genesis 32 and verse 28, the man said, your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel because you've struggled with God and with men and have overcome.

The name means God prevails or God rules. The point being that this is how it was going to be in Jacob's life, not his own man with himself in charge, but God's man.

With, if I could put it this way with Jesus in charge, Jesus in charge. And this is a basic question, isn't it?

It's the question you find all the way through Hosea, who's going to be in charge of my life? Is it going to be me or is it going to be Jesus?

[41:20] Well, it's a marvelous story. you need to read it yourself to fully grasp the wonder of it, that whilst Jacob gave up on God, God never gave up on Jacob.

And here's the application as it was brought to God's people at this time, verse 5, the Lord God Almighty, the Lord is his name of renown, but you must return to your God.

You've got to be like Jacob. Return to your God, maintain love and justice, and wait for your God always.

You've gone away from him. Now's the time to come back to him. Now is this God's word to someone this morning?

You've been away from him for a long, long, long, long time and he's calling you back. Come back to me and come back to my grace.

[42:32] As I was thinking about this this morning, the words of an old Scottish paraphrase came to my mind that's based on Hosea.

Come, let us to the Lord our God with contrite hearts return. our God is gracious nor will leave the desolate to mourn.

We're not quite finished. One more thing, in that not only do we see here God's overruling grace and God's descending grace and God's transforming grace, fourthly in a word, we see the providing grace of God.

And what I mean is that for the rest of his life, Jacob was to prove this covenant faithfulness as God again and again and again provided for him.

And so at the very end of his life, now this is in Genesis 48, Jacob was dying and his family was gathered around him and he made this wonderful confession of faith about God.

[44:01] Let me just first ask you this kind of trivial pursuit question. Who was the first person in the Bible to say the Lord is my shepherd?

Who was the first to say the Lord? You probably think David, don't you? It wasn't David. It was Jacob. Because as he was dying and his family were gathered around him, he spoke about the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day.

Genesis 48 and verse 15. He said to his loved ones that this is my story, this is my story.

The Lord has been my shepherd all the days of my life and in everything I've wanted for nothing. I've wanted for nothing. I've wanted for nothing. And my friends, this is the wonderful thing about being a Christian, isn't it?

[45:17] Jacob could have sung, as we sang earlier, all my life you have been faithful. All my life you have been so, so good.

good. That's Jacob's story. Is it your story? Well, let's pray together.

Our God and our Father, we thank you this morning for the wonder of your gospel in the Lord Jesus Christ, for your grace to undeserving sinners such as we, for loving us so much that you sent your one and only Son to the cross to bear our sins, so that we might come to know you not just as our Savior and as our faithful Father in heaven, but that we might come to know you as our shepherd, as the one whose goodness and love will follow us all the days of our lives.

Thank you for being so faithful. Thank you for being so, so good. We bless you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.