

## Sermon 23rd February 2025

**Text:** Hosea 7

**Title:** 'Hosea 7 and the Message of Relentless Love for Israel's Unfaithfulness' or 'Where is your faith?'

**Theme:** Christian Faith

**Aim:** To Feel encouraged to get closer to Jesus

**Sermon Style:** Midrasnic Exegesis

If you have a bible handy keep one finger or bookmark in Hosea 7 and one in Luke Chapter 8, verses 22 to 25.

Hosea Chapter 7 is page ... and Luke Chapter 8, verses 22 to 25, is page... in our church bibles.

Whilst you're doing that, sorting out your fingers and your bookmarks I will just remind us of what we are planning on doing for the next 20 minutes or so.

We are continuing our sermon series called "Relentless Love", a full journey through the entire book of Hosea, the first of the so called minor prophets in the Old Testament: that group of prophets who, like the other

larger prophetic writers like Isaiah and Daniel, had a very specialist and very powerful ministry.

Hosea's ministry was the ministry of being God's Messenger.

Jesus, too, of course, was - amongst other things, God's Messenger. In many ways there are parallels between Hosea's ministry and Jesus' ministry. Such as the way their own lives became a *living parable* of the prophetic message God had entrusted to them.

In Hosea's case this meant Hosea living the life of the cheated husband of an unfaithful prostitute - as we saw at the start of our sermon series. Hosea's own life story became a powerful living parable.

A parable is picture story - like the parables that Jesus used to teach others about the character and purposes of God; such as the parable of the sower, or the parable of the Good Samaritan.

For Hosea his living parable as the faithful partner of an unfaithful spouse was a powerful illustration of the love of God: how the God of love can still love and save even the most sinful and unfaithful of people.

In Jesus case it meant Jesus living and dying like a sacrificial lamb without blemish to atone for the sins of

all people. For Jesus his living parable being - as John the Baptist put it - 'The Lamb of God', was powerful illustration of the love of God: how the God of love can still love and save even the most sinful and unfaithful of people.

And just like Jesus Hosea's living parable matched his spoken words and the spoken parables or picture stories and verbal illustrations in his prophetic words about the relentless love of God.

Right. Hosea Chapter 7. Another chapter of Hosea that begins with a bang. Right from the very first verse.

Today we continue Hosea's picture story, his prophetic parable from God to the people of Northern Israel, including the people of the regions of Samaria and Ephraim. God's chosen people who had betrayed God by worshipping the other pagan Gods of Syria-Palestine, most commonly, the Baals, who were regarded as the weather gods of harvest and fertility as you might remember.

If you think about it for a moment it might be a shrewd move to collaborate with the weather gods; after all Israel is an agricultural society at this time, so it might make sense to partner up with the gods who had

control over things like agriculture and fertility and rainfall and ultimately productivity.

But as we were reminded earlier in our sermon series and as we know from Jesus' teaching, the greatest commandment, the shema, is to love the LORD God and *only the LORD* God, with *all* your heart and soul and strength and mind. But the problem with Baal worship is that its practices and teachings provided tempting carnal appeals to things like human sexuality, drunkenness, bestiality, human sacrifice, mutilations, and incest and ritual prostitution. Hosea calls all of these abhorrent practices out.

And here, in the seventh chapter of the book of Hosea's prophecy, we are confronted once again - full in the face - with a stark and dramatic picture of the lawlessness and chaos that Baalism and betrayal of the LORD god has brought about:

"Whenever I would heal Israel,  
the sins of Ephraim are exposed  
and the crimes of Samaria revealed.  
They practice deceit,  
thieves break into houses,  
bandits rob in the streets;"

It's the same motifs of illness and banditry and misery we've had in the previous two chapters being carried on here into Chapter 7.

And the parables and pictures that Hosea uses in this chapter are as enigmatic as any. There are 4.

An overheated oven, an undercooked loaf, a witless dove and a faulty bow.

What do they mean.

So how do we apply Hosea 7 to our context and our situation. *Can* we apply Hosea 7 to our context and situation. Is it just a message for another time, another people, another place. A message from the past that belongs in the past. Is Hosea 7 just history now?

I don't think so. I think Hosea Chapter 7 wants to speak to each one of us individually and as a church family today. (With a bit of help from the Holy Spirit.)

How *do* we then hear Hosea 7 as Hosea's original listeners heard it?

Well I find it easier to read if I change the word "they" to "you"

And then I find it easier to make sense of it if I punctuate each verse with a probing question

Right are you ready - I feel like I should be dressed in sackcloth and ashes ... remember this message is for me as much as it is for you - so don't shoot the messenger!

You are all faithless adulterers,  
burning like an oven  
whose fire the baker need not stir  
from the kneading of the dough till it rises.  
Your passion smoulders all night;  
in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.  
All of you are hot as an oven;

Where is your faith?

You are a flat loaf not turned over.  
Others sap your strength,  
but you do not realize it.  
Your hair is sprinkled with gray,  
but you do not notice.

Where is your faith?

You are like a dove,  
easily deceived and senseless—  
now calling to one,

now turning to another.  
Woe to you,  
because you have strayed from me!

Where is your faith?

Destruction to you,  
because you have rebelled against me!  
I long to redeem you  
but you speak about me falsely.  
You do not cry out to me from your hearts  
but wail on your beds.

Where is your faith?

They do not turn to the Most High;  
You are like a faulty bow.  
Their leaders will fall by the sword  
because of their insolent words.  
For this they will be ridiculed  
in the land of Egypt.

Where is your faith?

An overheated oven, an undercooked loaf, a witless dove and a faulty bow. You could say they are similes for foolish passion. Have you ever come across the expression 'heart over head' or 'in the heat of the moment'. Very often the outcome of acting - or not acting or *reacting* — in the moment because of an overpowering emotion leads to an outcome or consequence that we later come to regret.

But God knows us, even better than we know ourselves. He knows that we can be like overheated oven, an undercooked loaf, a witless dove or a faulty bow. We can succumb through our human weakness and sinfulness and lack of faithfulness to foolish passion, thinking and acting and speaking and thinking with our impassioned hearts rather than his Godly wisdom. Acting foolishly in the heat of the moment.

God is saying, I see it. I see your world. I see what you have to cope with. I see your challenges and hardships. I see the stresses and strains upon your lives that blow and buffet you off course. I see how easy it is for you to stray. So I'm not letting go. If you get swept away by everyone else and everything else that is trying to take you away from me I won't let go. I'll just stay closer. God is saying, if something else is

getting between us, stirring and swirling up our hearts and minds until all we can seem to focus on is the storm and chaos around us, I'll just quiet it.

Let's look at another living parable. Baal isn't the god of weather. Jesus is. Let's look at the account in Luke's Gospel of Jesus calming the storm: Luke Chapter 8 vs 22 to 25. [Does anyone have that open and would like to read that for us?]

One day Jesus said to his disciples, "Let us go over to the other side of the lake." So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, saying, "Master, Master, we're going to drown!"

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. "Where is your faith?" he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, "Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him."

That's relentless love. It won't blow away no matter how devastating the sickness, how unbearable the pain, how bleak the future, how terrifying the threat...

The relentless love of our LORD God for everyone of us whom he has created is unbreakable.

Are you holding on to unfaithfulness... Are you holding onto something that causes you to act or speak like an overheated oven, scorching and burning... are you holding onto a witless dove, a sense that you're useless and pathetic and only good for flying away at the first sign of trouble.

Hold on to something else. Hold on to something better. Hold on to a different message. If you ever wondered why Jesus' response to the understandable terror of the disciples was the question "Where is your faith?", just read the preceding two verses.

"Now Jesus' mother and brothers came to see him, but they were not able to get near him because of the crowd. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to see you."

He replied, “My mother and brothers are those who hear God’s word and put it into practice.””  
(Luke 8:19-21 (NIV))

So get closer to Jesus. If you want to let go of unfaithfulness and hold on to something better, hold on to the words of Jesus. Hold on to his Gospel. A different message. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you let go of whatever it is that is staining and straining your relationships with everything and everyone that is good and wholesome in your life. Speak and pray with a trusted Christian brother or sister. And hear God’s word. Sing it, listen to it, read it, paint it, photograph it. Get closer to it. When you get closer to God’s word you get closer to Jesus. As Jesus put it you can be as close to him as his own mother and brothers when you hear God’s word and put it into practice.

Let us pray...

Oh Brother Jesus, where *is* my faith...?

I am sorry for my unfaithfulness, all those things and people I put my faith in over and above the LORD God who made me and loves me in spite of my sin and selfishness, who loves me with his relentless love.

Through your Holy Spirit may I let go of all that is not holy, and cling instead to you. May I hear your words and put them into practice in my life.

In the name of the God of love.

Amen