

How Can I Give You Up?

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] And if you turn in the Bibles again to page 737 to Hosea chapter 11 and we continue our sermon series on this book of the Old Testament prophet Hosea and let's pray.

Lord God you've caused all Holy Scripture to be written to make us wise for salvation in Jesus Christ. So we pray, fulfil that purpose by your word in our hearts and lives today so that we may live for him and we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

This hurts me more than it hurts you. I wonder if you've ever said that as you were disciplining your little child or I wonder if somebody ever said that to you.

This hurts me more than it hurts you. I never believed it actually when I hear those words. Or did I ever hear them? Most parents of course know the pain of disciplining their children when they're naughty or wrong or bad.

And some know the deeper pain of real rebellion and rejection. Many of us may know parents whose children have gone seriously off the rails.

[1 : 31] I've met parents whose children refuse to have contact with them. I've known parents whose children are complete rebels. And you see the aching heart.

A heart of love and yet a heart that knows that they've done wrong and don't want to excuse that wrongdoing. What pain such parental love has to bear?

Well it may surprise you to know that God knows what that is like. And if you're a parent with such pain then be encouraged and comforted that God knows what that is like.

God knows that pain of love over rebellious children. God knows that pain of love over rebellion. Maybe one of the passages above all in the Old Testament that show us this is Hosea chapter 11 that we're looking at today.

For here God opens and reveals his heart to us. A heart that is full of anguish and agony. The heart of a loving but holy God.

[2 : 42] A heart that's in some emotional turmoil we might say over his rebellious children. In fact through this whole book God is opening his heart to his people.

Maybe this is the climax of all of that. You see God is far from the caricature of being unfeeling or impassionate or cold or hard.

God indeed is the opposite of those things. Deeply loving. Warm and emotional. And here in Hosea chapter 11 maybe above all other parts of the Old Testament we are driven to the throbbing heart of the deep love of God.

Mostly in Hosea we've seen a marriage analogy. God and his people as husband and wife. And the wife of course being an adulteress going after other gods all the time.

But now the analogy changes to the father-son analogy. When Israel was a child I loved him.

[3 : 59] And out of Egypt I called my son. takes us back to the early part of the Old Testament to the book of Exodus where the people of God descended from Abram have become slaves in Israel in Egypt.

And there out of Egypt they are called by God who raises up Moses to lead them through a variety of miracles into the wilderness and eventually under Joshua into the promised land.

But as God was calling Moses to that task he described Israel the nation the people of God as his son. And that's what Hosea is alluding back to in these opening words of chapter 11.

How appropriate then that in Matthew's gospel this verse is used and quoted. about another son of God the only begotten son of God Jesus.

Back in Exodus the lives of the children of God Israel were under threat by the Pharaoh the king of Egypt.

[5 : 21] Centuries later the only begotten son of God's life was under threat. when another king Herod the so-called great killed all the babies at Bethlehem.

To Jesus with his human parents sorry to Egypt Jesus fled with his human parents and then like Israel called out of Egypt by God towards the promised land so too was Jesus with his parents brought back by God from Egypt back to the land when the risk of Herod was over and Herod was dead.

Two children in effect Israel and Jesus rescued by God saved by God loved by God and yet how different those children were.

you see where later than Hosea Jesus was fully obedient and trusting his father as we see especially for example in the 40 days in the wilderness how different for Israel as verse 2 says the more I called them the more they went from me as though call them here and they go the complete opposite direction.

How perverse. This is the tragedy of love spurned and instead of coming to God they kept sacrificing to the Baals and offering incense to idols something we've seen time and again through the book of Hosea not just a one-off lapse but they kept doing it time and again persistently consistently repeatedly going after the other gods and ignoring God.

[7 : 15] You see the repulsion of idolatry is heightened when we realise that it is the rebellion against tender love and a rejection of it.

Israel's sin in going after other gods is not because God was a poor parent for them in fact the opposite of it. In verse 3 it was I who taught Ephraim another name for Israel to walk.

I took them up in my arms sometimes in the street or the shopping centre or somewhere you see a parent with tenderly leading their little baby come toddler as they're beginning to walk or whatever it is and that gentleness of just teaching them and as they fall picking them up and if they're crying dusting off their knees or whatever it is that they've fallen on.

That's the picture of God here. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk I took them up in my arms but they did not know that I healed them that I'm the one who healed them when they fell or brushed their knees metaphorically speaking.

This is a beautiful tender picture of God as a loving father with Israel his children as they get established as a nation as they begin to stand on their own feet so to speak and yet love spurned what a tragedy they did not know that I healed them ignorant without excuse I'd led them with cords of human kindness with bands of love the opposite of slavery where they might be bound or yoked now it's with bands and cords of love and kindness I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks to cuddle them to comfort them to kiss them I bent down to them and fed them as he did in the wilderness in the early days of the nation feeding them miraculously with manna and quail and water from a rock

[9 : 35] God's tender love for his people being recalled here in these verses and yet ignored spurned they didn't know that God had healed them and we saw in chapter five that they were looking to the king of Assyria to cure them they don't know where healing and cures come from and they have looked persistently in the wrong place but God will not ignore their ignorance and rejection of him they have failed despite the warnings of the prophets to return to God the word return is one that we've seen in the last couple of weeks and it occurs a number of times again in this chapter the basic call on Israel through this book is return to God but they haven't returned to God and therefore as a result what God will do is return them to Egypt verse five says they shall return to the land of Egypt and at the end of verse five because they've refused to return to me two times that word that simple word in this one verse return to

God no they say we ignore him well therefore God returns them to Egypt but Egypt here is standing for a place of judgment and slavery and punishment just like it had been in the days when God raised up Moses at the beginning of the book of Exodus when Israel was oppressed under a foreign ruler so the name Egypt here stands for a return to that not literally but the middle of verse five says and Assyria will be their king that is it's actually exiled to Assyria Assyria is like the new Egypt in Hosea's day and it certainly happens within maybe a handful of years maybe even less 722 BC the nation its capital destroyed and taken off into exile by Assyria Egypt is the paradigm for that exile in a sense and it happened the sword rages in their cities in verse 6 it's a terrifying picture it's using the present tense it's probably suggesting this is imminent and close it's about to happen we're not sure exactly which year these words were spoken but certainly not long before the destruction of Israel in the north but for the sword to be raging in their cities suggests that the walls of the cities

have been breached normally an army an enemy army would camp around the city the walls and gates would be closed and the city would try and hold out but here when the sword is raging in the city the gates and walls have been broken and their end is nigh it consumes their oracle priests the priests have been the speakers of wrongdoing those who are held highly culpable for the failings of the nation we've seen that in chapter 4 in particular but in other places last week as well and it devours because of their schemes the sword that's mentioned here is long been predicted on the nation of Israel if it disobeys way way back in the time of Moses in a chapter

I've already referred to two weeks ago Deuteronomy 28 that is so significant for understanding this whole book of Hosea that all the judgments that God is saying will come upon Israel are all anticipated back in Deuteronomy 28 if you disobey God then this will happen and that and this and that and Hosea is bringing them all back again as God's final warning to a nation that is about to end in summary verse 7 my people are bent on turning away from me they're bent on it they're determined to do it and all these warnings and woings of God back to him keep falling on deaf ears oh yes to the most high they call now in their death knell but he does not raise them up at all it's too late we've seen that a few times in this book it's too late it's too late for them to turn back their end is inevitable but God takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner don't think that God is licking his lips with glee thinking oh

I'm looking forward to Samaria being crumbled to the ground not at all he takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner and so what follows is a cry of deep anguish and agony from the depths of the heart of God himself how can I give you up Ephraim how can I hand you over oh Israel Ephraim Israel names for the same group of people how can I hand you over to Assyria how can I give you up forever this is the pain of love this is the agony of a parent whose child is persistently rebellious and deserving of punishment how can I make you like Admar and how can I treat you like Zeboi place names that may not ring bells in our ears though they're mentioned earlier in the Old Testament associated with Sodom and Gomorrah completely destroyed in the book of Genesis for its wickedness by God and in

Deuteronomy 29 this time they are also anticipated to fall under God's judgment judgment when Israel sins that is Israel will be like them under God's judgment God says my heart recoils within me my compassion grows warm and tender here is the agony of destruction that is deserved and yet a love that endures how can I do this I will not execute my fierce anger I will not again destroy Ephraim God is not saying here that he will suddenly change his mind and stop the destruction of Israel that does happen in 722 BC and these words are spoken not long before that but I will not again destroy Ephraim that is the destruction that is coming is not the final end is what

[16:43] God is saying for I am God and no mortal the holy one in your midst and I will not come in wrath slightly strange in a sense when God describes himself as the holy one we'd expect that he will come in wrath and yet he's saying announcing heralding future mercy and grace to come the key to mercy and grace is that I am God and no mortal see higher than our love and deeper than our holiness are those of God how deep his love is vast beyond all measure how can a God who is the holy one bring mercy to those who do not deserve it that's the agony of God's heart that is being expressed in this cry of verse 8 and verse 9 well out of the ashes of judgment rises the phoenix of the future of

Israel it's not the end not completely God is not saying I've changed my mind you will not fall to the sword of Assyria no no that's happening but that will not be the final end there is hope beyond judgment not in place of it is what this book is addressing us to and that hope is expressed in verse 10 they shall go after the Lord that's a change a marked change indeed a remarkable change for back in chapter 2 they go after the Canaanite gods the idols the Baals that is to go after them is to pursue them to love them to be devoted to them what a change that is you see when it says they go after or will go after the Lord this is a statement of absolute turnaround from that direction to this when God has called them up till now they've gone the other what is being spoken of here is that they will go after the

Lord not the lovers that they've had but the Lord you see this is Israel remade remade by God's grace they shall go after the Lord who roars like a lion yes earlier there was a different word for lion used and that was the lion of judgment and terror but now comes the lions roar to beckon back the people of God and they'll come his children shall come trembling chastened embarrassed from the west they shall come trembling like birds remember two weeks last week I think or was the week before the bird imagery of chapter seven I think that Israel's politics were like pigeons flying stupidly

and senselessly from one country to another trying to buy their security and all to no avail but now they'll come back like birds from

Egypt like doves from Assyria from wherever they might have gone after their stupid and senseless sins they will come back and fly back trembling back to God brought home to the end of verse 11 says I will return them to their homes says the Lord to a place of permanence to a place where they belong to be with God forever they failed to return to God therefore God will return them to Egypt my people verse 7 said are bent on turning away from me but the time is coming when God will beckon them back and return them to their homes with him what a lovely picture of extraordinary love of

God when does it happen not immediately some of the people of Israel when Assyria conquered fled and joined the southern nation Judah 140 years later that itself was exiled by Babylon this time 538 BC 70 years or so later some of them came back that's the beginning of the fulfilment of this they didn't come back remade though then but when Jesus came that was the beginning of the remaking of the people of God the beginning of the inner transformation so that they do return to God but a day is coming when the lion of Judah will roar the day of judgment when Jesus returns and beckons to their eternal homes all the people of

[22 : 19] God and all of this future hope stems from God not from Israel completely undeserved even to the very end of destruction completely undeserved any hope love and yet God remarkably driven by love takes the initiative to preserve his people at least a remnant of his people in the end a love to the loveless that they may lovely be you see this is a passionate God a God warm in love yes fiery and wrath rightly so wouldn't have it any other way for that would just compromise his morality to its roots but a God warm in love and full of audacious grace and all the more is this grace audacious when we remember yet again the state of his people there is not even a smidgen not even a glimpse or whiff of goodness about them verse 12 says of chapter 11

Ephraim has surrounded me with lies and the house of Israel with deceit they're the people that God is saving liars deceivers the end of verse 12 is contested it says in this translation Judah still walks with God and is faithful to the holy one and yet two verses later there is an accusation against Judah and will be punished but the verses and the words which are a bit contended there is an alternative reading that suggests that Judah is not indeed walking with God but is unruly towards God and that seems to make a little bit better logic I think that Judah the southern group of God's people the southern kingdom stands also under future judgment as well what is their sin Ephraim herds the wind well it's a good day to think about herding the wind there's plenty of it you see might as well get it all while it's here so after church

I imagine you'll go home and you'll start herding the wind around your house how are you going to capture it what are you going to do with it I mean herding the wind is an odd idea they're chasing the wind what a wonderful expression of futility of a waste of time you cannot herd the wind it's hard enough herding sheep let alone the wind but it's saying what is the case for their sin partly their political sin as they've tried to find security not from God but from other nations it's like chasing the wind all to no avail the nation falls but it's an apt description as well of sin in general sin that is so rich in promise but empty and bankrupt in delivery as we pursue lives of sin it's like chasing the wind we gain no benefit in the end indeed the opposite we capture nothing Ephraim heard the wind it pursues the east wind that is the scorching desert wind up from the

Sahara all day long how stupid that is they multiply falsehood and violence they make a treaty with Assyria and oil is carried to Egypt here again is the stupidity of their pigeon politics they fly up to Assyria to make a treaty with them abandoning therefore their covenant with God but then at the same time they go down to Egypt and give them oil as a gift to try and keep them on side all of it futile because the nation comes to an end now most of the book of Hosea is addressed to the northern group of Israel the kingdom remember of God's people had divided 200 years before after King Solomon died the north is generally called Israel or Ephraim and the south is Judah and Hosea largely is addressing the north but now addresses the south although as we'll see in a few verses time it seems to be broader than just the south because he starts using Israel or Ephraim again saying

I have an indictment or an accusation against Israel now in chapter 12 verse 2 the Lord has an indictment against Judah the southern kingdom and he's going to punish Jacob that's another name for Judah according to his ways and repay him according to his deeds and what follows then is a history a history that goes way back to the book of Genesis to illustrate the history that goes back to

the people of God see God's people began when God made promises to Abram in Genesis 12 and the grandson of Abram was Jacob twin brother of Esau and through Jacob who had 12 sons comes in effect the 12 tribes of the people of Israel and all of the origins of that come in the book appropriately called Genesis Jacob was not a good man a deceiver even in the womb of his mother twin remember being born with

[27 : 57] Esau he tried to supplant his brother and we read about that from Genesis 25 onwards but in his young adult life again not a model citizen deceiving his father and stealing his brother's birthright a deceiver a supplanter verse 3 says in the womb Jacob tried to supplant his brother but then later on as a man married with children the end of verse 3 says in his manhood he strove with God he strove with the angel and prevailed refers to the incident way back in Genesis chapter 32 Jacob had gone out of the land to get a wife he ended up with two and two of their maids and a whole host of children and lots more sheep and he came back eventually to the land and as he arrived at the borders of the land at

Mahanaim he wrestled with this angel who represented God and he strove and prevailed to a degree and God remade and renamed Jacob the name Israel that's where it comes from he strove with God and Jacob re-entered the land God met Jacob or Israel at Bethel verse 4 goes on to say and there he spoke with him it happened on the way out before he went to get his wives in Genesis 28 and probably referring also after he came back in in Genesis 35 and there he met with God which God verse 5 says Yahweh the Lord that is the God of hosts Yahweh is his name that's part of the history of Israel and Judah their ancestor Jacob not a good man a deceiver a supplanter but he come back and he wrestled with God and was remade by God now this history is applied verse 6 but as for you as for you the descendants of this man

Jacob as for you the descendants of this man called Israel return to your God just like Jacob had gone out and come back returning to God striving with him wrestling with him remade and renamed by him you return to your God hold fast just as Jacob held fast in wrestling with God you hold fast to love and justice two of the three things that chapter six we saw a couple of last week I think God desires steadfast love and justice hold fast to them and wait continually for your God you see the ancestor Jacob though never a perfect man is used as an example here of somebody who had gone out of the land and come back and met with God the living God and was in a sense remade by God so too for Israel they will go out of the land in exile as punishment for their sins but return to God come back to him and be remade by him but far from that is the reality at the time Hosea speaks for the people of God in verse 7 are like a trader in whose hands are false balances that is let me buy a kilogram of salt okay let me pull out this kilogram weight that is it's 800 grams but you don't know that and I'll sell less for what you want and I gain so I'll get more back and pay less for it that was going on in these days we know that from the book of Amos and indeed archaeologists have found distorted weights from this period of history you see Ephraim is rich it says in verse 8 but they are blind and stupid and arrogant they have gained wealth for myself in all of my gain no offence has been found in me that would be sin how blind to the truth Ephraim is the people of God you see their danger is they love to oppress the end of verse 7 said they're oppressing the poor there are many many rich people thoroughly corrupt at this time indeed Amos more than Hosea exposes those sorts of social sins I am Yahweh your God he's the God they've got to meet to be remade by him I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt I will make you live in tents again as on the days of your appointed festival back in the 40 years in the wilderness as they came from Egypt into the promised land they lived in tents and one of the festivals the festival of tabernacles was for a week a period when Israel would live in tents to remind themselves of God's provision in that time and now what God is saying is out of your opulent houses and summer palaces you will go out into the wilderness into exile at the hands of

[33 : 16] Egypt or Assyria and you'll live in tents again a bit like your festival that you've so perverted as we've seen in recent excuse I spoke to the prophets it was I who multiplied visions and through the prophets I'll bring destruction but the warnings of the prophets like Hosea and Amos and others have not been heeded yes Israel is ready to be destroyed in Gilead one of its cities there's iniquity referred to back in chapter 6 we saw last week they shall surely come to nothing and in Gilgal one of their very religious places full of all sorts of terrible practices of religion that so pervert what God had required they sacrifice bulls so their altars shall be like stone heaps on the furrows of the field God will bring it to nothing and then back to the history lesson some say this verse seems a little bit out of place but it seems to be making a little play on words here it's a more

subtle sort of accusation

Jacob fled to the land of Aram and that's what happened in Genesis 28 onwards when he went to get his wife there Israel another name for Jacob served for a wife and for a wife he guarded or literally kept sheep and we know that from the book of Exodus how he in fact had large flocks and herds and then by a prophet that is Moses the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt and by that same prophet Israel the nation now was kept Jacob had gone into exile keeping sheep God God's prophet Moses had kept Israel and the subtlety of the accusation is that Israel has not kept the commandments of God it is given bitter offense and so his Lord

Yahweh will bring his crimes down on him and pay him back for his insults within years if not months of these words the nation of Israel was gone as I said some of them fled to Judah and joined the people of God there some later became what are called the Samaritans but the nation never really came back again even when people came back to the land after the Babylon exile was never rebuilt as a nation with a king Hosea's hope here relies on the love of God of an agonizing love for a perverse and rebellious child how can God who is holy at the same time be merciful how can love and justice which seem to us competing demands both stand together for if

God says forget the judgment I'll love you anyway he compromises his holy standards love but he gives them the judgment that they fully deserve it's all over and no hope the agony of God's heart is expressed here what will he do how can I give you up oh Israel but the agony is resolved 750 years later where wrath and mercy meet where the wrath and judgment against sin is finally and fully satisfied paid for by God himself so that mercy can be received undeserved wrath paid for by God's son so that mercy is received by

God's adopted sons and it's resolved at the cross as God's son hung there and died a steadfast love that will not let us go an audacious grace Hosea's exposure of the heart of God finds its resolution in our Saviour's death that's why we have hope a real sure and certain hope despite our sins love but the call of Hosea still stands return to the Lord turn away from our idols and our first loves to God turn away from our sins and our greed to God turn away from thinking that we find security in politics or in anything else and turn to God come back to Him as the

[39 : 09] Lion of Judah roars and beckons us back to our homes where we belong our eternal homes made secure by God's only begotten Son return to God alles Stone a millet perd state ve at going a what a me hariceless a