

"How Can I Give You Up?"

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Date: 02 August 2020

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[0 : 01] Good morning and a very warm welcome indeed to the service here from Stornoway Free Church. We trust that together, wherever you're watching from or partaking in the service, that you'll know God's blessing and that together we'll know of his blessing through his Holy Spirit.

I'm going to begin by reading from the Scriptures, from the Word of God, and that reading is from Hosea, the prophecy of Hosea, chapter 11, we'll read through from the beginning down as far as the end of the chapter.

At verse 12. So that's the book of the prophet Hosea, chapter 11.

Here we go. No, that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with the bands of love. I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them. They shall not return to the land of Egypt, but Assyria shall be their king, because they have refused to return to me. The sword shall rage against their cities, and consume the bars of their gates, and devour them because of their own counsels.

[1 : 29] My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, he shall not raise them up at all. How can I give you up, O Ephraim?

How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Adma? How can I treat you like Zeboam? My heart recoils within me. My compassion grows warm and tender.

I will not execute my burning anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

They shall go after the Lord. He will roar like a lion. When he roars, the children shall come trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria.

And I will return them to their homes, declares the Lord. Ephraim has surrounded me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit. But Judah still walks with God, and is faithful to the Holy One.

[2 : 36] Amen. And may God bless my reading of that word. To his own praise. We're going to now engage in prayer. Let's join together and unite in prayer. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, we give thanks today for your faithfulness.

when we have been reading about the faithlessness of Israel long ago, and when we look into our own hearts and find so much of unfaithfulness and lack of consistency in ourselves.

O Lord, we thank you that you are so different, that you are at all times consistent with your own being, that you are always true to yourself and true to your promises and to your word that you have revealed to us.

We thank you today, Lord, for all that makes you glorious, for your holiness, for everything that you have revealed in your word about you. Help us to worship you, taking account of all that you have revealed, so that we may accept all that you say about yourself.

That we may do so, Lord, believing that you will indeed come to reward those who believe and trust in you in a way in which they do not deserve, yet which is very real to them in Jesus Christ.

[3 : 53] That wonderful inheritance of eternal life which you promise to all who trust in you. O we thank you today, Lord, for your word. Once again, as we use your word, we do pray that your Holy Spirit will bless it to us.

We confess in your presence, Lord, our own inability to understand your word aright, to apply it aright, to be in any way consistent with its teaching.

That we need your Holy Spirit, Lord, to open our hearts to receive the truth of your word, to know that truth working through our lives. We ask, O Lord, today that you would add to the knowledge and the application that we already have of your word in our hearts.

We give thanks today that you know us in all our circumstances, in our homes, in our families, in our communities, in our own personal lives. We thank you for this, O Lord, for it brings to us the comfort and the assurance that you are able to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

that you will not leave any aspect of our need unseen or undealt with as we require, O Lord, that need to be met. We thank you that you have already demonstrated this through the coming and through the death of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 12] We thank you today that on the ground of his merit we can come to you and that we are assured of your welcome when we come bearing his righteousness and carrying him in our hearts for his sake you are well pleased with us as we come and to trust in you once again.

Help us, we pray, to renew our relationship with you today whatever we have been over the past days or weeks and even through the course of our life thus far.

Lord, we thank you today for the opportunity of renewal and for the opportunity of coming once again in repentance of our sin, confession of our need, and bowing down in your presence and accepting what you bring to us in the offer of the gospel, that cleansing and that salvation that is so abundant in Jesus Christ.

We pray for your church today throughout the whole world. We know, Lord, that there are many in worse circumstances than more difficult circumstances than we have. We pray for them especially, O Lord, as they wrestle with things like persecution and poverty, so much of a lacking, O Lord, in basic necessities.

Bless them, we pray, where they are and give them to continue to be faithful to you even in the midst of such trials. Remember us, we pray, here in our privileges. Help us, Lord, we pray, to use our privileges to your praise and to your glory and enable us to be thankful for you require of us to be thankful and we would not want to be thankful just for the sake of being thankful, but thankful out of a true recognition of your goodness, of how much we owe to you and of how much we appreciate, O Lord, all that you do for us and all that you have done and all that you promise yet to do for your own people.

[7 : 05] We pray your blessing, Lord, today for any in the audience in the hearing of the gospel that have not yet yielded their hearts to you. We pray today that you would come, Lord, into their lives with the power of your truth, the power of your spirit.

For you make it clear to us in your word that while it is a wonderful thing to have the gospel and to have that knowledge in our minds of God and what he has done, yet, Lord, we require that our life is delivered over to you, to be ruled by you and to be delivered from self and from the dominance of ourselves in the way in which we have come to be fallen sinners.

O Lord, we pray that your own blessed power today will be evident in rescuing sinners from death and from condemnation and bringing them into the glories of your kingdom and into the liberty with which Jesus makes us free.

As we pray, our young people and our children today, we thank you for them. We bless you again that they belong to your church in a meaningful way even during the times of their youth. And we ask that you would make us thankful, O Lord, for all the families that come to give themselves to worship the Lord with his people and join together from time to time in doing so.

We pray the blessing for them today, O Lord, even during this time when we are unable to be together in a building as we once were. We pray that you would help us even now to appreciate that you bind us together by your Spirit and that we are not dependent on having buildings in order to appreciate the grace of God and the power of God.

[8 : 47] Yet, Lord, you have given us such buildings as means by which we can gather together in fellowship meaningfully and personally and in a physical way.

We ask, Lord, that you would bring this about once again, that you would give us perseverance and patience meantime but that you would grant us, O Lord, your blessing so that we may be delivered from these restrictions and come back again to the freedom to join together as we once did that we enjoyed then.

We ask your blessing for our nation and for all the nations of the world who are perplexed by this virus. Lord, we pray that you would bless our leadership and government locally and nationally.

We commend them to you once again and pray that you would give to them the wisdom that we always pray for, O Lord, for them, that wisdom from your truth and from yourself.

We ask that you would be pleased, Lord, to guide us onwards as a people and help us especially to learn from this incident and to be concerned, O Lord, to have our lives conform to your truth.

[9 : 56] You are speaking to us through this providence also. We pray that we may listen and that we may realise how great God is and how much we need him. Hear us, we pray now, and continue with us and pardon our sins and cleanse us for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Now, children, today we're continuing with our studies of birds of the Bible. We're really running out of the birds in the Bible, so we'll turn to something else probably next time.

But there's one other bird I want to mention today and that's the cockerel. It is a bird, although we're used to domesticated hens, chickens, cockerels, and in the Bible the cockerel is mentioned particularly in Luke chapter 22.

I'm just going to read a couple of verses there. This is Jesus saying to Peter that he has to watch as he goes into the future. This is not long before Jesus was taken into custody and then went on to die on the cross.

But in Luke chapter 22, Jesus is saying to Peter that Satan has desired to have him, that he might sift them all, that he might scatter all the disciples like wheat.

[11 : 09] But he said, I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthened your brothers. Peter said to him, Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.

Jesus said to him, I tell you, Peter, the cockerel will not crow this day till you deny three times that you know me. And then later in the chapter, we find that Peter is asked three times if he is a disciple of Jesus.

And three times, he says, no, he's not. And this is then what we read there in verse 60. Peter said, Man, I do not know what you're talking about.

And immediately, while he was still speaking, the cockerel crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, Before the cockerel crows today, you will deny me three times.

And Peter went out and wept bitterly. What is it we read about here? And why did Jesus say this to him? Well, Peter denied Jesus.

[12 : 16] He denied knowing him. He denied that he was a disciple. He was challenged about whether or not he was one of Christ's followers. And sadly, Peter three times failed to confess that he was a disciple.

What he was afraid of those around him were not told exactly, but he denied him three times. And that's such a serious thing, isn't it? To deny that we know Jesus.

To say to people, No, I have no business with Jesus. I have no relationship with him at all. That's such a really serious thing that God is not at all pleased with.

And why did Peter come to this? How was it that Peter ended up denying Jesus when he was one of his main disciples? Well, for one thing, Peter didn't listen to Jesus.

Jesus had said to them, all the disciples there with him, to rise and pray in verse 46, that you may not enter into temptation. Instead, they were asleep.

[13 : 17] So Peter didn't listen to Jesus because Peter didn't really pray over what Jesus had said to him. That's always important for ourselves, children as well as adults, that we pray for God's help as we go in from day to day towards whatever that day has for us, so that we will not fall in temptation like Peter did and deny Jesus.

Remember, denying Jesus is not just refusing to say that we know him. Denying him also includes living in such a way as makes it clear that we love Jesus, that we are followers of Jesus.

So Peter denied Jesus. Peter didn't listen to Jesus and pray the way Jesus had asked him. And so this is what happened. But then Peter repented of his sin.

We read here that he went out and wept bitterly. We know from that and elsewhere that Peter was very sorry that he had done this. One of the great things about Jesus and about God and the love of God is that when we come to him, even after we've done something wrong and confess our sin and ask for his pardon, God will actually do that for us.

He will forgive our sin. He will restore us, like Psalm 23, where David is saying about God something that Peter came to know himself, that he restores our soul.

[14 : 52] He puts us right again and he forgives and covers our sin. So that's what happened with Peter as well. And that's important for yourselves as children, as young people, that you come to God every day and confess your sins, as we do when we read and say the Lord's Prayer in a few minutes, to forgive us our debts, our transgressions, our sins, as we forgive our debtors.

And third, the final thing about Peter is when you read the Bible, the rest of the New Testament, find that Peter became a very strong Christian. Not only did he become a strong Christian by turning back to the Lord and being forgiven, he became a helper of other Christians as well.

He became a great preacher and an apostle in the early church in the book of Acts. So these are things about Peter that we associate with the crowing of the cockerel.

And I'm sure that every time Peter, from this time onwards for the rest of his life, that every time he heard a cockerel crowing, he remembered the sad thing he had done.

But he also remembered how kind, how loving Jesus was to him in forgiving his sin and in coming to bring him back to fellowship with himself.

[16:16] So let's say the Lord's Prayer. Let's pray the Lord's Prayer together. Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

We're going to now look at verses from the chapter we read in Hosea and especially verses 8 and 9 where God is saying about Israel, also called Ephraim, the same people, How can I give you up, O Ephraim?

How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Adma? How can I treat you like Zeboam? Now we'll be dealing with God's questions, a few of them up to now.

[17:21] We're going to have some more, God willing, afterwards as well in the weeks to come. And we're not taking these questions that come from God to us in the Bible. We're not taking them in any particular order, but we are looking at questions that always address things that are really, really important for us.

In fact, you never find God asking questions, whether it's in the Old Testament or the questions that Jesus himself asked. You never find him asking questions that aren't really serious or for no reason. And so as we look at these questions, they always are attached always to things of really importance and seriousness in our lives. Now as ministers, sometimes we think we might have a tough job.

Some ministers have a tough job, a very difficult time of it, a tough task. But really, when you look at what God gave Hosea to do and the kind of thing that he asked Hosea to be to his people, we've got a very easy time of it really.

Because God said to Hosea, as you find in chapter 1 and verse 2, he was to go and marry a certain woman who was going to turn out to be a very unfaithful woman, an adulteress.

[18:34] She was going to leave him. She was going to have children to him. And she was going to leave him. She was going to go and live with somebody else. And then in chapter 3, God said to Hosea again, go and buy her back.

Take her back to you. Re-establish the relationship. What is all that about? What is that really, really challenging, difficult life that God gave to Hosea about? Well, it's a picture.

It's an image. It's a living parable of the relationship between God and the people of Israel at that time. Because that's exactly what what God said when he said, go and take yourself a wife of whoredom, of children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom and forsaking the Lord. And then chapter 3, which really the key to the book of Hosea, the Lord said, go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress even as the Lord loves the children of Israel though they turn to other gods.

That's really the key to this wonderful book, this prophecy of Hosea. It's the love of God particularly. It doesn't show us simply the ugliness of sin and the ugliness of unfaithfulness, whether it's to one another or to God especially.

[19:49] It does do that and it doesn't minimize that and it doesn't pull any punches. It doesn't actually in any way minimize the seriousness of these things.

But what it really projects to us and it projects against that dark background of the debauchery and the unfaithfulness of Israel and of sinfulness, it really presents us with the wonderful, sparkling, indescribable love of God.

That's what you find in these two verses we're looking at today under the questions that God put to Israel. How can I give you up? How can I hand you over? How can I make you like Adma?

How can I treat you like Zeboam? I will not execute again my burning anger. And as God describes his love for us there, let's just try and get into it a little bit to understand enough of it, not only to appreciate it and what it is, but to actually rejoice in it and to come today to realize that this wonderful love of God, this love that we don't deserve, this love that comes to us across our sinfulness, that it's a love that really is the ground of our very being spiritually if we're going to come indeed to enjoy eternal life.

Now, three, I'm going to take this under three headings. First of all, headings, it's really taken from the psalm that we'll sing at the end of our worship today, Psalm 130, If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?

[21 : 29] That's the first heading, and it's going to deal with the first part of chapter 8. Second heading is, we have a window here into God's heart. We find that in the second part of chapter 8, my heart recoils within me, this is God still speaking, my compassion grows warm and tender.

There's a window by which we see into God's own heart. He allows us to see the workings of his heart, the movements of his own heart. And thirdly, verse 9, we'll take that under the heading of the love that will not let go.

The love that will not let go. So let's look at it, first of all, If you, O Lord, should mark iniquity. He's talking here about Adma and Zeboam.

Adma and Zeboam were cities or towns in the plain, along with Sodom and Gomorrah, which God destroyed. They were destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah because of their utter gross wickedness.

So when he says here about how can I give you up, O Ephraim of Israel, how can I hand you over, O Israel, giving up or handing over means God is saying, how can I give you up to destruction?

[22 : 47] How can I hand you over to utter condemnation? Israel deserves no better than that God should do that. When you read verses 1 to 7 of this chapter itself and God describing the love he showed to them, how he brought them up just as a father or mother brings up a child, he taught them to walk, he took them by the arms, he led them with cords of kindness and bands of love and yet he goes on to speak about verse 7, my people are bent on turning away from me despite all that God had done for them, despite the wonderful salvation that God had brought to them, they had gone after these idols of the Canaanite religion, they had gone after these as lovers, as Hosea says, instead of God, they had turned away from God to them.

They didn't deserve that God would turn to them and renew his love and renew that relationship with them. They deserved no better than would happen to Adma and to Zeboam along with Sodom and Gomorrah.

And so it's all the more wonderful when you see, as we'll go through this, what God is actually saying. He's not going to do that. Instead, he's going to provide restoration, ultimately, for these people.

Now we mustn't think that because of what you read in verse 9 of the chapter, where God is saying his decision, if you like to put it that way, our language about God is always limited, but if you think of it, deciding not to execute his burning anger, deciding not to destroy Ephraim, you mustn't think that because you find that in verse 9, that what he's saying in verse 8 is not really all that serious, that God was not really being all that serious and that that was just some mechanism by which you would come to reinforce the reality of his love.

Well, that's not like that. The reality of God's anger is a reality. It's not something that you treat lightly. It's not something that you say is a mechanism in order to present his love or show the depth or the extent of his love.

[24 : 57] And that still applies to us. Because in principle, you don't deserve the love of God. I don't deserve the love of God. And yet God still shows his love toward us. In 1 Thessalonians 1, verse 10, Paul is speaking there to the Thessalonians and he describes them as people who have turned from idols to serve the living God and to await for his Son from heaven, even Jesus, whom he raised from the dead who delivers us from the wrath to come.

You see, for Paul, the wrath of God, all you need to do is read the first few chapters of Romans and you'll see that God, that for Paul, God's wrath was as real as anything else about him.

And it's a destructive thing. It's something that burns against sin. Revelation chapter 6 reminds us of how it will be at the end of the world order as we know it now when God comes in his judgment, in his final judgment, when the seal was opened.

Then he says, the kings of the earth and the great ones, in verse 15 of chapter 6 in Revelation, the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb for the wrath, for the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand?

You don't want to be out of Christ on that day. You don't want not to be saved on that day. You don't want to be anywhere else but safe in Jesus and in his salvation because when that day comes as it will however long it takes between now and then, that day is a reality and the wrath of God revealed in it as a reality and that's what Hosea is really bringing to us here.

[27 : 03] That's what God was saying to the people of Israel to them through Hosea. Don't think that I'm joking, you could say, as a summary of what he's saying here.

How can I give you up away from him? How can I hand you over to Israel? How can I make you like Adman, like Zerbom? This, he's saying, is what you deserve. This, my wrath as revealed in the destruction of these cities is really what I should in reality if I go by what you deserve.

This is what I should do to you. You know, doesn't it show us not only the reality of the wrath of God, but it shows us too that God's love for us as sinners is entirely unmerited.

You have done nothing and I have done nothing today to actually deserve this love. We have done nothing whatsoever to persuade God to love us because we are unloved, unlovable, as we are in ourselves by anyone other than God.

Who else would have loved us when you see what the Bible describes sin to be. But God, as we'll see later, is not like us. God's love, the reality of it, the provision of it, is not merited by us and yet we receive it and we receive its benefits.

[28 : 34] So that's the first thing. if you were to mark iniquity, O Lord, today, you and I must treat our sin seriously.

We mustn't see it as we try and measure ourselves by other people and say, well, I'm not as bad as he or she is and I don't do anything such as the great crimes that I find people actually doing like murder, whatever else you can say, is obviously an evil.

I've never done any of that and people think, then that's okay. That means I'm a good person. That means that God will accept me and he will deal with me in the final judgment like it will such, obviously, gross sinners.

Well, the Bible is saying to us, you may not be on the same level in that respect of sin and of sinnership, but as sinners, sinners, all of us require to be forgiven, to have our sin dealt with, to accept Jesus and to realise that but for that we also would be destroyed.

So that's a great ground of thanksgiving today, that the love of God is real and this comes across to us in the Gospel. Secondly, as we look further on in this chapter, in these verses, a window into God's heart.

[29 : 59] In the second part of verse 8, there God is saying, my heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. Here is God saying, how can I treat you the way you deserve to be treated?

How can I do this to you? Even if you deserve it, how can I go through with that? How can I make you like these cities that I destroy? And he says here, my heart recoils within me.

What you're saying is God's warm affection. It looks here a bit like God is in some kind of emotional turmoil. We're looking into God's heart and the language that's used here in Hebrew is something that conveys great movement and a lot of inward motion in God's own heart, if you like.

It's so difficult to describe God's heart even though it's revealed to us in this language. The language is the language of emotion, of emotional turmoil indeed you might say. But of course God is never confused, God is never confounded, God is never unsure.

He's using this language to bring out the fact of his compassion, the wonder of his compassion.

What we must never say is that oh God is never confused and never unsure and never confounded.

[31 : 14] He's never coldly distant. He does not act in love without the movement of his own heart being engaged in it. It's not for God something like a mathematical formula where you come and work things through and you reach a conclusion and there's little emotion, unless you like mathematics of course, which many of you I'm sure do and I'm not decrying that for a moment.

What I'm saying is the love of God is not just formalism, it's not just something distant, something out there that happens without really any emotional involvement on God's own part, though we use

the word advisedly.

What he's saying here is my heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. He is deeply affected, the language is saying to us, by what he sees in Israel, what he sees in ourselves as lost sinners.

He's not unmoved by that. It's not something he stands at a distance from and says, well that's something that I need to deal with, but I'm not really going to touch it, I'm not really going to get involved in it, I'm not really going to have any movement of my heart toward it.

He's saying the very opposite. And you know that Jesus, as God, as the Son of God, reveals God to us in the work that he did, in the ministry that he carried out as recorded in the Bible, of course.

[32 : 37] And in Matthew chapter 6 and verse 34, you find that chapter dealing with the feeding of the 5,000. But there is a wonderful reference there that when Jesus came and saw this great crowd following him and he looked out over them, you can just imagine him just in front of him there, around him as he looked upon them, he was moved with compassion.

Why? Well, you might say they'd been following him for a long time, they hadn't been fed physically, they were needing food, and he was moved with compassion surely in order to provide some food for them, isn't that what the feeding of the 5,000 did?

Well, yes, literally, physically, of course it is, for he saw them as sheep without a shepherd. The compassion of Christ's heart as it went out towards these people was not primarily because they had not had food for a long time, it was because he saw their need to be shepherded, their need to be enclosed within his love, within the provisions of God's salvation, compassion.

And that's what stirred his heart, that's what moved him, that's what his compassion was about. And it's very similar to what you find here in Hosea.

You find a very similar thing in Isaiah chapter 59, where God is saying there, can a woman forget her only child, that she should not have compassion on the fruit of her womb.

[34 : 12] He goes on then to say, they may sometimes forget, yet I will not forget you, I have graven you on the palms of my hand. So I think, I said 59, I think it's 49, we heard Kenny's preaching on this not so long ago, in chapter 49, verse 15, can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb, even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.

And the wonderful thing there is, Kenny went on to speak about being engraved in the palms of God's hand, and it's a wonderful thing itself, of course, as he showed, but the point today I want to mention is that the word compassion there is really almost identical to the word that's used for womb in Hebrew.

And you can see how these tie together, how the fruit of the womb, the child of the womb, as that comes to be loved by the mother who bore him and brought him into the world or had him into the world.

There's such a close connection between the womb of the mother and the child that she bore in her womb. And that's God being described in his love for you.

More or less saying spiritually I gave birth to you. Or Hosea here saying in the chapter as we read, out of Egypt I called my son, I loved them, I gave birth to them spiritually, I made them in Israel that I then reared and I brought up and I taught them to walk.

[35 : 47] And now they're bent on turning away from me. So what am I going to do with them? How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I destroy you? How can I give this to you? My heart recoils from it, he says, I will not do it.

Oh, that's what you deserve. And you know that's such a wonderfully powerful window into God's heart, where you find the motions of his heart as it were his inner being without any inconsistency or any failure on God's part.

And yet nevertheless, his heart is thrown out as were to Israel in her plight, in her disobedience, in her idolatry.

And you go through, we'll see some of the other questions related to that as well. God willing, Ezekiel chapter 18 and verse 31, there's another question from God. Turn, turn Israel, why will you die?

And then the ground of his appeal is the same as here in Hosea. Saying, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from their way and live.

[37 : 08] And I don't think again, as I said earlier, that wicked there just describes the grossly wicked. It's describing every one of us as we are naturally in our relationship with God and our

rebellion against God.

There's no pleasure. He has no delight in condemnation. Judgment is strange work. It's not something that he himself has any pleasure in whatsoever.

You see the same in Jesus when he came to Jerusalem, Luke chapter 19, and when he lamented there as he did on another occasion as he wept over the city.

And as he said, oh, if only you knew and realized for your peace, just as he had said earlier, that he would want to have gathered them as a hen under her chicks under her wing.

Where is that? Where is the root of that? It's in the fact that God has no pleasure whatsoever in the death of a soul in one soul being lost, in one soul refusing.

[38 : 16] You know, when you come to that judgment of which we read in Revelation, nobody there, none of those who are lost will have the ground or the warrant to say, it's your fault, Lord.

It's because you didn't love me. It's not God has no pleasure but that we turn from sin and come to him.

Well, here's the window into God's heart and isn't it always significant that the darker the background and the more serious it is, as it is here in the sin of Israel, the more wonderful the love of God sparkles against that background like a diamond against a black velvet cloth.

How can I do this? How can I hand you over to Israel? How can I make you like Adma? How can I turn to destroy you? My heart recoils from that.

I have no pleasure in even contemplating that he's saying. My compassion grows warm and tender. That brings us to the third point which is the love that will not let go.

[39 : 30] I will not execute my burning anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim for I am God man, the holy one in your midst.

Here he's saying a series of I will not, I will not execute my anger. I will not destroy Ephraim. I will not come in wrath. This isn't a change of mind on the part of God because he's making it obvious this is part of who he is and what he's like for I am God and not man.

He's not choosing here somehow not to be fully God for a moment in order to actually excuse these people or in order not to mark their iniquity against them. It's actually in the reverse.

He's not doing this because for a moment he stopped being God or being what God is like or being untrue to himself. I am God. This is why I'm saying what I'm saying.

He's saying to Israel I will not do this. I will not execute my anger for I am God and not man. I think what he's saying by that is if I were like yourselves you would be destroyed.

[40 : 35] If I were a man, if I were human, if I were given to human emotion and to human conclusions then you would have no place to stand. I would just mark your iniquity against you.

I would treat you as you treat one another and as you've treated me. But I am God and not man. Now we don't have time to go into it but you can see the time here for I am God and not man, the holy one in your midst.

And he's not just reminding him of the seriousness of sin against the holy, holy. But he's also reminding us as we read this that holiness is not a thing that's stern and unmoved and distant from us.

It's not there as a characteristic of God, steely, unmoved. Well he's showing us here that holiness is God's perfect wrath against sin, yes.

But God's love is a holy love. It's very much a part of his love just as much as it is of his wrath. I am the holy one in your midst.

[41 : 57] If I were anyone else, you would be destroyed. If I were not consistent with myself, God is saying, this is what I would do. He would not hold back.

He would destroy us. We would be burnt up forever. Wonderful that the holiness of God is a holiness involved in salvation, though it is also an element behind his wrath and behind condemnation.

Celebrate the fact today by coming to him, by worshipping him, by thanking him, that as the holy one in the midst of his people, he is consistent in upholding them and in keeping his wrath from them.

Now then, I want to finish by speaking about the direct line between here and the cross. The love that will not let go is a love that is shown pre-eminently in the death of Jesus.

And there's a direct line between this passage and the cross of Christ, the death of Jesus. Because when you think here of what he is saying, I will not execute my burning anger. I will not again

destroy Ephraim.

[43 : 12] I will not come in wrath. I will not apply to Christ's people, to everyone who comes to be saved. This is what God is saying. I will not do it.

I will not destroy them. I will not actually come in anger. I will not do away with them. These words, I will not cover them. I will not turn, I will not turn, I will not turn, I will not do it.

I will not do it. When you look at Jesus on the cross and the death of the cross, God is not saying about him, I will not do it.

I will not give him up. I will not turn to bring condemnation upon him as he stands in place of his people. That's what you find, isn't it, in Romans and chapter 8, that wonderful passage in chapter 8 of Romans, where Paul is dealing with the way in which God's love has been shown so abundantly in Jesus and in the death of Christ especially, when he comes towards the end of that chapter to sum up and say, well, what are we going to say about these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? And then notice, he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. That's the language of Hosea.

[44 : 41] That's the language where God is saying about the people and what they deserved. I will not do that. I will not give them up to condemnation, to destruction. There's no such thing for Jesus.

Because for us, condemnation meant Jesus taking our place and Jesus not being spared, even though he is the son of God.

He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how did I with him graciously give us all for us? Bearing shame and scoffing rude, in my place condemned he stood, sealed my pardon with his blood.

Hallelujah! What a saviour! What a love! What a saviour! Two brief points in application and that's we're done.

God's love is the ground of believers' comfort. Not their own faith, not their trust, not their fellowship with each other.

[45 : 57] The ground of Christians is the love of God. You go back and say, well, my ground of confidence and assurance and comfort is in the death of Jesus and the cross of Jesus.

Didn't you just say that that's where God did not spare you? Of course it is, but what's behind that? What led to that?

What provided that? Where did that cross come from? It came from the love of God. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

That's the ground of our comfort today. When you're tempted to go and place your confidence somewhere else, when you're tempted to actually think that God has lost his love for you, that God does not love you anymore, when you're tempted to think that when you've done something you know is inconsistent with obedience to Jesus, to God, and you may, like Peter, in some sense have denied Jesus.

Don't think that he's going to stop loving you. Don't make an excuse for your sin, but don't think that he's going to stop loving you. How can I give you up, O Israel?

[47 : 17] I will not execute the fierceness of my anger. Draw all your comfort today and always. from the love of God, from its nature, from what's revealed about it in the Bible, that's the ground of your comfort.

That's where your assurance comes from, because you know that whatever else will change, that will never change. That's why Paul went on in Romans 8 to say, who then will condemn?

It is Christ who died and is risen again, but the love of God has provided for us. God's love, while it's the ground of believer's comfort, we are not to make it a faithless presumption.

Don't make it the ground of faithless presumption. Just because you know that God is wonderfully loving, that the love of God is behind our salvation, that God does not mark our iniquity against us as we deserve, end up in heaven without faith in Christ, without giving over your heart to Jesus, because that's the way into the kingdom, born again through trusting in Christ, by the work of God's Spirit.

So today as you look into the heart of God, let your heart also be looked into, in my heart. Let me look into my heart, you look into yours.

[48 : 56] As we look into the heart of God, what do we find in our heart? Does it correspond to the love that's in his? Are we still not saved?

Have we still not received Jesus for ourselves? Presuming us? But somehow we will be in heaven.

If you die without Christ, you will be in hell. There is no love there. There is no author of salvation there.

You have that now. You have the love of God now speaking to you. you have God through his word speaking to us. Come to this Christ, the provision of God's love, and give our heart to him whose heart is so full of love.

Lord, our sinners. God bless his word to us. Let's pray. Almighty God, we thank you for the word that is evident to us in what you say in your word, and especially in what has been revealed through the cross of Christ, your son.

[50 : 16] We bless you today for the quality of your love, for its consistency, for the way that we are never to doubt it. And we thank you for all that is embraced in it, in our salvation, in our redemption, in our future as well as our present.

We pray that you bless us and accept this our worship. We come to you, Lord, and offer it to you, seeking pardon and cleansing from all our sin. for Jesus sake.

Amen. We're going to now sing in conclusion from Psalm 130, so I'll need to get a psalm of the psalm.

Psalm 130 in the Scottish Psalter. And we'll sing to the tune, Martyrdom. Lord, from the depths to thee I cried, my voice, Lord, do thou hear, and to my supplication's voice, give an attentive ear.

And then we come to the words we used in one of our headings today, Lord, who shall stand, thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, but yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayest be.

[51 : 24] These verses, and we'll sing the whole psalm to God's praise. Lord, Lord, for all the steps to thee I cry, my voice, Lord, do thou hear, I do my supplication's voice, give an a bears, a 62-koeah, TECHNASY, God, behold, God, shall stand, God, let us start, God, for all iniquity, who shall stand, and, thegensess, Istle, Iniquity, but yet with thee Forgiveness is that fear thou mayest thee

I wish God my soul doth wait My hope in his word more than they that For morning watch my soul waits for the Lord I say, morning to watch the morning light to see Let Israel open the door for with him mercy speak

And plenteous redemption is ever found with him And from all years iniquity is Israel shall redeem Now may the grace of God the Father, the love of God and Jesus Christ be with us all through the Holy Spirit, now and evermore. Amen.

Be of God service julie Jo True Sort By And Jo