

Hosea 11:12-12:14

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Preacher: Matt Coburn

[0 : 00] Good morning.

Good morning. Are we on? Can you hear me? No? No? Here we go. Got it? Great. Thank you, James. Glad you all are here this morning.

If you want to pull out your pew Bibles and turn with me to page 758, I want to spend just a few minutes at the beginning of our time together. I want to pull back the curtain and let you see a little bit of what I do when I do a little Bible study preparation because it's going to relate to our sermon this morning.

Page 758, we're looking at Hosea, which is our ongoing series. Hosea 58 or Hosea 11. I'm going to read verses 12 through chapter 12, verse 2, to show you something that struck me as I was looking this morning, or looking at this passage this week.

So read with me page 758 in your Bible, chapter 11, starting in verse 12. 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.

[1 : 23] Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind all day long. They multiply falsehood and violence. They make a covenant with Assyria and oil is carried to Egypt. The Lord has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways.

He will repay him according to his deeds. Are any of you struck by something as you look at those three verses? In verse 12 of chapter 11, Judah is presented as positively faithful and following God.

In chapter 12, verse 2, the Lord has an indictment against Judah and has a problem with them. So I put in my notes, why the big shift?

How do we understand this? It seems like it's almost contradictory. And so it makes me look, and one of the first things that I do is I say, I wonder how other translations did this just to look.

And so I looked, and if any of you are reading the NIV this morning, you may have noticed this, that the NIV reads verse 12 of chapter 11 this way. Ephraim has surrounded me with lies and the house of Israel with deceit.

[2 : 36] And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One. Okay, so now you have two English translations that are saying really different things.

This is an opportunity for us to dig deeper into Scripture, friends. This is an opportunity for us to say, whatever's behind this verse, it was hard for translators to figure out how to do it well, or they disagreed on how to do it well.

And so we need to think. And so I went and I started a conversation. I started a conversation with a couple of guys who lived in the last couple of centuries who wrote commentaries. And I said, what's going on in this verse?

And they helped me read my Hebrew Bible a little bit. And even you, without knowing Hebrew at all, could read these guys and enter into a conversation. And as I looked, I found out that literally this verse might be translated, Judah is roaming in regard to God and to the faithful Holy One.

Judah is roaming in regard to God and to the faithful Holy One. Well, what in the world does that mean? Well, you can see how the English translators try to make more sense of that because it doesn't say much.

[3 : 46] Roaming with regard to God, is that a good thing? Are they walking freely with God? Or are they roaming away from God? Are they wandering like a child wanders from his parents in danger?

So at the end of the day, how do we decide? How do we figure this out? Well, context is king. So I looked through the book of Hosea. And you know what? Hosea has only one reference that's positive about Judah.

And all the rest of them are negative. And even that positive reference in chapter 1 has to do with Judah, not with Judah's escape from judgment, but in fact that his judgment would only be postponed.

Secondly, when you look at the flow of chapters 11 and chapters 12, if Hosea or God is making a contrast between Ephraim, the northern kingdom, and Judah, the southern kingdom, it is totally undeveloped.

There is no hint throughout the whole rest of the passage that he's making any distinction. In fact, it seems like he's lumping them together. And so, as we read our passage later this morning, I will tweak what you see in your Bible and will read the NIV reading of the end of chapter 11, verse 12, because I think it's a better reading.

[5 : 11] A couple of final thoughts. In sorting this out, I didn't do anything that you could not do. When you see verses that are hard, that seem contradictory, it is an invitation to dig deeper into Scripture, to be humbled before God's mind, which is bigger than our mind.

It is an opportunity for us to enter into a conversation with the church, both contemporary and historically, to figure out how others have sought to understand this verse.

And ultimately, it ought not to shake our confidence in our English translations or in our Scripture. For I think it is fair to say no major doctrine hangs on a verse like this that is so disputed or so disagreed upon.

If you have more questions, come talk to me. I just want to pull back the curtain so that when we look at this verse later, you'll get a sense of why I am going to read it the way that I did.

All right. Having said that, let's turn to our passage and look at it together. Let me read the whole thing with a little inundation.

[6 : 29] Hosea 11, 12. Ephraim has surrounded me with lies in the house of Judah with deceit and the house of Israel with deceit. And Judah is unruly against God, even against the faithful Holy One.

Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind all day long. They multiply falsehood and violence. They make a covenant with Assyria and oil is carried to Egypt. The Lord has an indictment against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways.

He will repay him according to his deeds. In the womb, he took his brother by the heel. In his manhood, he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed.

He wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel and there God spoke with us. The Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial name.

So you, by the help of your God, return. Hold fast to love and justice and wait continually for your God. A merchant in whose hands are false balances, he loves to oppress.

[7 : 34] Ephraim has said, ah, but I am rich. I have found wealth for myself. And in all my labors, they cannot find in me iniquity or sin. I am the Lord, your God from the land of Egypt.

I will again make you dwell in tents as in the days of the appointed feast. I spoke to the prophets. It was I who multiplied visions and through the prophets gave parables.

If there is an iniquity with Gilead, they shall surely come to nothing. In Gilgal, they sacrifice bulls. Their altars also are like stone heaps on the furrows of the field.

Jacob fled to the land of Aram. There Israel served for a wife. And for a wife, he guarded sheep. By a prophet, the Lord brought Israel up from Egypt.

And by a prophet, he was guarded. Ephraim has given bitter provocation. So his Lord will leave his blood guilt on him and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds.

[8 : 37] We pray with me. Lord, this morning as we come to this text, Lord, we are humbled before.

Lord, you have spoken to us. And yet, Lord, there are times when we struggle to know what it is you are saying to us. Lord, this morning I pray that by your spirit, through your word, Lord, you would speak to us.

That you would make clear to us what you are saying in this passage. Lord, I pray that my words might convey your truth. And Lord, that all of our hearts would be ready to receive what you have to say to us this morning.

Pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Duplicity is a universally despised character flaw.

Consider, perhaps, how you respond to some of these names if you're familiar with them. For you, history buffs, Benedict Arnold. Benedict Arnold was an American general in the American Revolution who wanted to hand over West Point to the British.

[9 : 53] Or, for those of you who are political watchers, Aldrich Ames, a CIA operative in the 70s and 80s, who revealed the identities of numerous agents to the Soviets, many of whom lost their lives as a result.

Switching gears for those of you who are fantasy readers, how about Saruman the Wise, who betrayed the White Council to try to get his hands on Frodo's ring.

Or, Peter Pettigrew, the friend of James Potter who betrayed him to the evil Voldemort. Duplicity is something that we despise.

Duplicity is something that would be defined as presenting ourselves as being one thing when we are, in fact, something else. And that's exactly what each of these men were. They pretended to be one thing when, in fact, they were something else.

But how easy is that for us, too? Sometimes it's a calculated plan. We want to make a good impression. We want to gain an advantage.

[11 : 03] We want to hide something that we might be afraid would give us a negative reaction by those around us. And so we pretend to be something that we aren't quite.

Sometimes it's unconscious. I may think that I'm the greatest singer in the whole world. But, in fact, I can't carry a tune to save my soul.

If I present myself as a great opera singer, and yet I can't sing, I am duplicitous, whether it's intentional or not.

When the reality does not correspond to what is being presented. Now, when we think about this in the religious realm, I think it carries even more weight, doesn't it?

And maybe this is because in the religious realm we claim to be working in the currency of ultimate truth. It may be that we see that religion has such a profound effect on people's lives.

[12 : 05] But when we see religious duplicity, which we'd often call hypocrisy today, oh, how we respond.

We despise it. We hate it. What does God think? I believe this is what our passage is about this morning.

And as we look at our passage, what I want you to see is that God calls his people out of spiritual duplicity to faithful devotion by reminding them of his gracious faithfulness.

Let me say that again. God calls his people out of spiritual duplicity to faithful devotion to him by reminding them of his gracious faithfulness.

Why do I say that? Well, let's look at the text together. As we're reading this passage, I'm not going to go through it sequentially. Sometimes when you're reading prophetic literature, it's not presented in a logical argument like we see in a place like Romans.

[13 : 13] It's instead presented in these cycles or these patterns where here's a thought and then here's the same thought stated a little differently. And then here's the same thought with a little bit more development.

And that's what I think is going on in this passage this morning. There's a header. Chapter 11, verse 12 is kind of the header that says God has a problem with his people, with Ephraim, the northern kingdom, with Judah, the southern kingdom.

He has a problem with them. And then there are three sections, each which exhibit this pattern. The first section is verses 1 through 5. The second section is verses 7 through 10.

And the third section is from 11 to 14. If you're taking notes, let me say that again so you can write it down because it will be helpful as you go back to look at this. This is not an easy passage to figure out the flow of thought.

The first section is 1 through 5. The second one is 7 through 10. The third one is verses 11 through 14. And in each of these sections, what you see first is a pronouncement of the spiritual duplicity of God's people.

[14 : 21] And the second is a surprising reminder, not of God's judgment, but of God's faithful action, gracious work towards his people in the past.

And for those of you who are counting, you may have noticed that verse 6 isn't a part of any of those cycles. And that is because it is the central point of what the prophet has to say to us today.

And that is where we will end this morning as we see that this is where all of these patterns, as they're repeated, is meant to draw us to that single exhortation.

So let's look first at the first half of this pattern where we see God exposing the spiritual duplicity, hypocrisy of his people.

The problem that God has is this. His people say that they are his, but in practice, they are anything but. They say in verse 1, God is our king and warrior.

[15 : 24] But in verse 1 instead, they look to political treaties and intrigue to save them. They say God is our provider. And yet in verse 7, they claim to have gained the riches that they have on their own by their own hard work.

They claim God is the focus of the worship. He is the one that we worship. And yet they worship golden calves and idols in places like Gibeah and Gilgal.

They claim to be God's holy people, set apart to live differently in the world because they know God, because of his loving work in their lives.

They claim to be God's holy people, set apart to live differently in the world. They claim to be God's holy people, set apart to live differently in the world.

This is a striking image in chapter 12, verse 1. It says Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind all day long.

[16 : 33] It's the picture of a cow going out into a pasture and eating all the grass in the field. They feed on the east wind. And they pursue this continually all day long.

And the east wind, ironically in Israel, if you can think about your geography, comes from the desert. And it is a dry wind that destroys crops and brings drought.

And there's a contrast here. Do you remember back in chapter 6 when Hosea said, if you truly repented and returned to the Lord, this is what it would look like? It would look like these words on your lips.

Let us know. Let us press on to know the Lord. His going out is as sure as the dawn. And he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

But instead of pressing on to know the Lord, they're pursuing the east wind. Instead of pursuing the rains of refreshing of God's love, they're pursuing the emptiness.

[17 : 37] In their political strategies, in their idolatries, in their unfaithfulness. Hosea shows not only the duplicity of their actions, but also the futility of it.

They think they're taking care of themselves, but they will end up in ruin. For the coming Assyrian invasion will be like the worst of the east wind. And contrary to verse 7, they will be stripped of their wealth.

And in verse 11, we see their altars and their places of worship end up being piles of stones that are impediments for the farmer sitting in the middle of furrows.

Hosea is saying, my God's people, because they say they're his, but do something else. They have earned this utter desolation that will come to them.

They have brought upon themselves by their duplicity the result that they reap. And so we see in verse 14, the summary.

[18 : 56] Ephraim has given bitter provocation, so his Lord will leave his blood guilt on him and will repay him for his disgraceful deeds. God will not take the sin away.

He will leave it on them. And in the heavenly court, it is a capital crime. And Israel will suffer the consequences. Well, that's the first part of the pattern.

But isn't it nice to know that in our day and age, we don't struggle with this problem of spiritual duplicity. Or do we? Of course, that's not the case. All we need to do is look through the headlines in the last decades to think how appallingly evident it is.

Those of you who may remember in the 80s, the Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Baker, more recently, Ted Haggart, these are names of people who claim to be one thing and yet in the end were something else.

This has rocked the Catholic Church where they have claimed to have priests who are caring for their flock. Instead, some of them being predators.

[20 : 11] This is something that we have seen in the church in our age and is a terrible thing. It has provided fodder for skeptics and late-night comedians alike, all to the shame and dishonor of Christ.

Some of you this morning may be here trying to figure out what Christianity is and you may be sitting next to a friend and you think, I really like this person and they have a life that I really respect.

But when I look at the church as a whole, I think, what a terrible, terrible place it is because of these things. I want you to know that God agrees with you that these things are terrible, that this is not how it ought to be.

But before we dismiss the problem as being someone else's and not ours, let us examine our own lives. Are there areas of your life where you claim to follow Christ and yet, in fact, do something otherwise?

Do you say you live for Christ in all that you do and yet actually live two separate lives? One, your work persona, and one, your church persona. Do you come and present yourself as the faithful, loving husband in church while the reality at home has no resemblance to the gracious love, patient kindness, or humble faithfulness of Christ?

[21 : 50] Do you claim to trust God for your finances, yet fudge your taxes? Do you say that you are satisfied by the love of God and yet spend your weekends desperately seeking companionship, consolation from anyone who will look your way?

And even, do you come here this morning as a spiritual seeker, but are in fact unwilling to be challenged in your skepticism, to take an honest look at not the faults of the church, but the claims of Christ?

I was thinking about how this plays itself out in my own life. I was thinking, where are the places where I struggle with this? There were a number of things that came to mind, but let me just mention one.

I claim to serve a sovereign and loving God who cares about me and is able to act for my good and for his glory in the world.

Does my prayer life actually reflect that? Do I regularly take a challenging conversation, an unforeseen problem, and run to the throne of grace and say, God, you're sovereign and you're good.

[23 : 20] Help me. Help me understand how to respond to this. When I think about the longer-term issues of how do I raise my son and my daughter, how do I love my wife well and lead my family spiritually?

Do I spend time on my knees regularly seeking the God of the universe who says, I am sovereign and good and I'm here?

When facing the greatest trial, do we run to him in prayer, seeking comfort and strength and refuge, or do we run the other way?

What does your prayer life say about how real your claim for Christ really is? Are we, like Israel, chasing after the east wind rather than running to him who will bring spring rains of refreshing and renewal to us?

God has little good to say about hypocrisy and spiritual duplicity. He says it is empty, it's foolish, and it's offensive, and it deserves scorn and contempt and judgment.

[24 : 58] Yet, thankfully, this is not all God has to say to us. Four, this is only the first part of the pattern.

I told you there are two parts. The second part is, if the first part is saying, this is what I have against you, the second part is, what we expect is, therefore, this is what I'm going to do for you.

What we expect and what we've seen so much in Hosea over and over again is because Israel is this way, therefore, I will judge them. I will cast them out. I will cut them off.

Because he said that a lot, and he has every right to say that. But in the pattern of this passage, he doesn't do that. Every time he says, this is what I have against you.

And now I want to remind you who I am. Remind you of my intrusion into your history.

[25 : 57] Who I am and how I have acted towards you. I want you to recall my gracious intervention on your behalf in the past. And so we see this, working its way through these, in these chunks.

So verses three through five recalls the story of the patriarch Jacob. Jacob, who, like Israel in Hosea's day, loved his own schemes, sought to usurp his brother to gain a birthright, ran away, had this great scheme war with his uncle Laban, figure out who could get out with the most sheep and the most wives and daughters.

God comes. As Hosea relates the story, God comes and meets Jacob. Jacob, whose name means he grasps at.

His schemes are meant to try to attain for himself. God meets him at Bethel, as we heard earlier in the reading. God meets him at Bethel and he changes his name. He says, you are not to be that anymore, but you are to take your tenacity and you are to make that a tenacious devotion to me.

And so I'm going to call you Israel. Israel, which means he strives for, he strives for God. And Hosea is reminding him, God is reminding Israel, do you remember God who met his people, Jacob, at this place called Bethel?

[27 : 38] And remarkably, this is the only place where the city of Bethel is called Bethel in the whole book of Hosea. Because everywhere else, it is called Beth-Avon.

Bethel means it is the house of God. Beth-Avon means it is the house of wickedness. And the theme of this story is that God comes in and he transforms Jacob, the schemer, into one who strives to know God wholeheartedly.

And yet you, Israel, have made the place where God met you a place of wickedness. Do you see the graciousness of God?

In verses 9 and 10, you see the same thing again, that God is one who would strip them of their prosperity, of their material wealth, so that they might know again dependent devotion to him.

Ephraim says, look at what I've done. Look at all the things that I have amassed. And God says, no, I am the God who delivered you from Egypt.

[28 : 50] I am the God who brought you out when you had nothing. And I provided for you the riches of Egypt as you left Egypt. And I provided for you in the wilderness water and food, manna.

I delivered you from enemies that you could not defeat. And now that you have become so proud in this, I'm going to strip all of those blessings from you in love so that you will know again the devotion, the love, the dependence that you had for me in the wilderness.

And just as a side note, it's remarkable that God thinks of the wilderness that way. Because if you go back and you read numbers, they were not a particularly lovable or faithful people.

But he says, in that time, you knew what it was like to depend on me. But now you have forgotten me completely. This reminds us of the words we've read earlier in Hosea.

Do you remember Nick's sermon on Hosea 2? God's lovingly stripping of all the blessing, all the goodness of being God's people.

[30 : 12] And then verse 14 saying, therefore behold, I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her and there I will give her vineyards and make the valley of Achor a door of hope.

And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as in the days when she came out of the land of Egypt. God lovingly delivered his people and provided for them.

And he's saying, I'm going to take you back into the wilderness so you will remember my love again. And then in verses 10 and verses 13, you see God saying to his people, though you are falling into worshiping idols, I will continue to speak to you.

I will continue to send prophets to instruct you. In verse 13 particularly, you see, he says, I sent a prophet as a shepherd to walk with you through the wilderness as you were in a foreign land in Egypt, I sent one to shepherd you out and to bring you in.

In contrast to Jacob whose schemes led him out to Aram and where he had to tend sheep in order to gain his wife. There's a contrast there.

[31 : 36] God is saying, I have been the one who has guarded you and shepherded you. And particularly here in verse 13 there's a reference to Moses.

But it's interesting that Hosea doesn't name him. He just says, the prophet. The prophet. The prophet was the means by which God brought you up out of Egypt.

The prophet was the one who guarded you. Do you remember God's loving, gracious initiative? That's what Hosea is saying to God's people.

And it has two intended effects, I think. The first one is a bit of a rebuke. God has done all this for you and what do you do with it? You throw it back in his face. You just forget about it and go on.

You don't cherish it. You don't value it. You don't remember it. You don't honor it. But there's a second part. A loving part.

[32 : 43] And if you're in Sunday school this morning, this is the call and the comfort of the gospel. The second part, which is the invitation and the call.

Look with me at verse six together. Because in the middle of this pattern, again, there is this striking verse. This exhortation to God's people.

So you, by the help of your God, return. Hold fast to love and justice and wait continually for your God.

Two key ideas here. The first one is that the central call here is to return. And we've said that this is the whole theme of the book of Hosea. Hosea, in love, is going after his people, going after his prostituting, unfaithful, adulterous people, his idolatrous, self-dependent people.

And God is running after them saying, turn, come back, return to me. And he's saying, return to me and restore the relationship that I long to have with you.

[33 : 56] the covenant relationship that I established with you. And when it says, let us hold fast to love and to justice, that's kind of like code for saying, come back and re-enter into the covenant that I made with you.

Be my covenant people again. Make me your God and I will make you my people. And I will shower you with my love and my grace.

and this is the call of chapter 12 and this is the call of the book of Hosea that God in love is calling his people to forsake their waywardness and come back to him.

But secondly and sweetly it says how? How do we return?

How do we get back? Do you see it? By the help of your God return. Wait on him continually.

[35 : 04] continually. You see God knows God knows that they and we cannot return to him on our own.

The weight of our sin the shackles of our shame the burden of guilt this would prevent us this would prevent us from heeding his call and returning apart from his gracious intervention apart from his working for us.

It says wait for him. Wait because you can't go and do this but you have to wait for him to come to you.

Just as Jacob had to wait as he wrestled through the night just as Israel had to wait for 400 years in Egypt for God to work.

They couldn't make it happen. Only God's gracious initiative could make it happen. And in this God is reminding them and reminding us that he will do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

[36 : 27] God comes to us. God and isn't this friends the good news of the gospel. Isn't this what God does for us in Jesus?

Jesus who is not a schemer but in whom there is no guile at all. Jesus who though he was rich became poor on our behalf so that we would not trust in our own riches but find him to be the greatest treasure of all.

Jesus who came that we might no longer worship God at an altar here or there but that everywhere in spirit and truth we might worship him.

Jesus who came as the prophet Moses to deliver his people the prophet after Moses to lead us in an exodus out of sin and hell.

Jesus who came as the good shepherd whose sheep will hear his voice and whom he will never give up. Jesus who took on their blood guilt for their sin who was disgraced for our disgraceful deeds as he went and died on the cross for us.

[37 : 47] Jesus who was forsaken by God in the wilderness of Golgotha who died on the cross for the sins of the spiritually duplicitous like you and me and yet cried out father forgive them they don't know what they are doing.

Jesus comes as the greatest act of God's gracious initiative to bring back to win back his people for himself.

Friends this is the import of our passage today. Are we chasing the east wind? Are we living duplicitous lives where we say we are one thing and yet living another?

Jesus comes and he says I know everything about you. There is no duplicity with me and yet I love you. Give up your pretenses.

Give up your facades. Give up your hypocrisy and come to me. Come to me as you are a sinner and receive my grace my love my faithful love that has pursued you for your whole life.

[39 : 28] Come and live with me again. Be my people and I will be your God. As I was talking about this message last night with Brandy.

We were talking about this and I see the places where my life is not as consistent as I want it to be. I'm ashamed before the Lord for those things but I'm also so grateful because God God is faithful to me and he calls me to wait wait for God to meet me in the places where I am not yet all that I know he has saved me to be.

I pray it would be true for you as well this morning. Let's pray. O Lord will you fill us this morning with a remembrance and a knowledge of how wonderfully gracious you are to us.

How in love Lord you pursue us. How in love you call us. God I pray I pray this morning that Lord we would see most evidently at the cross of Christ that we would see your loving call for your creation to turn to turn from all these other things to find you to be the one thing that we most long for.

God I pray you would help us see how this plays out in our daily lives and Lord help us to take Lord the wonders of your amazing love Lord and apply it Lord to each particular situation Lord that we might not be hypocrites but that we might be Lord vessels of your love and grace Lord that overflow in this world God we pray these things in Jesus name Amen