

Hosea 8

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[0 : 0 0] Well, back in the 1970s, when I was a very small boy, there were many rubbish game shows on television. A particularly rubbish one that even I remember, sadly, was one called Mr. and Mrs.

! And the basic premise was, some of you may know it, they get a husband and wife in, and they'd ask separately, they'd ask all sorts of questions, to the wife about the husband, to the husband about the wife, and to see how well they knew each other.

I think you can find these kind of questions online now, things you can do on hen do's and stag nights and stuff like that. So, for example, what's the one thing apart from you that he'd save in a fire? What's his favourite meal? What's his favourite song? What would he say your favourite song is?

And, of course, it's a way of seeing whether this couple have really listened to each other, whether they really know each other or not. And it's possible, isn't it, to actually be with someone for a long time, even in a good marriage, and actually just take them for granted, and think you know a whole load of things about them, and actually not really pay proper attention to them.

Not really listen. And that's the problem here in Hosea 8. The marriage is really falling apart. The marriage between God and his people.

[1 : 1 5] And the tragedy is, Israel doesn't even realise it. But they're about to realise it. Look at verse 1. Set the trumpet to your lips. Hosea is to give an alarm call.

The siren is going off. To wake them up. Say there is trouble here. And you see what a trouble is as you go down. One like a vulture is over the house of the Lord. One like an eagle, even.

And they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law. Verse 3. They have spurned the good. God is saying, you have turned away. Back in Deuteronomy chapter 30.

When God was renewing his covenant with Israel. Having brought them out of Egypt. The next generation. In Deuteronomy 30. He renews the covenant with them. It's like renewing the wedding vows. And he gave them this choice.

See, I've set you before you today. Life and good. Death and evil. Good if you choose me. Evil if you choose to desert me. And here the Lord is saying through Hosea.

[2 : 1 2] They spurned the good. They spurned me. They've turned away from me. They've transgressed. They've rebelled. They've spurned. Verse 14. They have forgotten their maker. Their husband.

And yet look how Israel responds. Verse 2. To me they cry. My God. We, Israel, know you. It's like the Mr and Mrs game. Don't we know all about you God?

We really do. We're your people. Yet actually they don't. What they think they know. They do not know. Because they thought. They were being religious. Well they were being religious.

And they thought that's what God wanted. But you see the Lord's view on that. If you look down at verse 11 for a moment. Because Ephraim. That's Israel. Has multiplied altars for sinning. They have become to him.

Altars for sinning. The idea was. They were building all these altars. Around the country. The altar was the place. You'd offer your sacrifice. To have your sins forgiven. And they were treating this.

[3 : 0 8] Like it was a slot machine. Okay. We need our sins forgiven. We'll burn a cow here. And that should make it all right. But they weren't acting in faith. They weren't listening to what God had said. So these altars.

Were not a means of being forgiven. Rather they were just another way of sinning. Just another way of rebelling. Just another way of them trying to assert their independence. And many of us.

We can. Even those of us who are Christians. Can be guilty of similar things. Can't we? Even if we know we're only forgiven. Through faith in Christ. Yeah in our minds. We often think. Good stuff we do. Religious activity we do. Somehow earns us some favour with God. Somehow helps to mend our relationship with God. I've come to the lunchtime talks this week. I'm doing all right. I go to church. I must be okay. I pray sometimes. I give to charity. Surely these are things God wants. Aren't they? And yet we can delude ourselves.

[4 : 06] Just as Israel deluded herself. She thought she knew God. She thought doing these religious things was what God wanted. But they were wrong.

They didn't know God at all. So how is it they deluded themselves? What are the causes of their not knowing God? What are the characteristics of a life not really knowing God?

And what are the consequences of not really knowing the Lord? What are the things that Hosea covers here? So first of all. What's the cause? What's the underlying problem? And the underlying problem is of course they haven't listened.

Just like in a marriage or any relationship. How can we know what the other person wants? Unless we're listening. If we don't listen we're just guessing aren't we? And that was Israel's problem. Look at verse 12. You'll see it. The Lord says. Were I to write for him. For Israel. My laws by the ten thousands. They would be regarded as a strange thing. Now when God talks about his law.

[5 : 02] He's not talking about council by rules. Impersonal laws that we come across in our society. Rather God's law was the expression of his character. It was his desire for his people.

How they were to live as his. As his cherished, beloved, rescued people. And yet the Lord is saying. Actually if I were to tell them what they wanted. They would think this is strange.

They'd be affronted. They'd be like the wife who's surprised. When the husband says. You can't go out to work in a dress like that. With a shirt that short. Why are you putting pictures on Facebook. Of your pole dancing club. That's ridiculous. If that sounds ridiculous. That's exactly what a friend of mine told me. He said to say yesterday to his wife. Amazingly. And yet she was like.

What are you doing? Why are you talking to me like this? The Lord is saying. The relationship in Israel is so broken down. You think my laws. My love. Is an alien.

[5 : 58] A strange thing. You don't want to be restricted by it. But it's easy. Even for those of us who are Christians. To be like Israel. To go through life thinking we know what God wants.

Thinking we're doing Christian things. And yet actually not hearing. And responding. To God's word. Listen to what the Lord Jesus himself says. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew chapter 7.

Verse 21. Not everyone who says to me. Lord. Lord. Will enter the kingdom of heaven. But the one who does. The will of my Father.

Who is in heaven. On that day. Many will say to me. Lord. Lord. Did we not prophesy in your name? Cast out demons in your name? And do mighty works in your name? It's like Israel. Saying Lord. We know you. Look. We've got these altars everywhere. We're sacrificing on. Jesus is known. He goes on. Then I will declare to them. I never knew you.

[6 : 51] Depart from me you workers of lawlessness. So the cause of not knowing the Lord. Excuse me. Is not heeding his word. Not listening to it. Not responding to it.

Now what are the characteristics of a life. Where we're not really. Paying attention to what God says. Well the three characteristics. That Hosea highlights here in Israel. That counterfeit saviors.

That counterfeit gods. That counterfeit Christianity. If I can call it that. Look at verse 4. That counterfeit saviors. The people were looking to political alliances. Or to new kings.

New leaders. Who they thought would provide them safety. Or guarantee their prosperity. Look at the Lord's opinion on that. Verse 4. They made kings. But not through me. They set up princes.

But I knew it not. In Hosea's day. There were about four different kings. Who were assassinated. In a period of 12 or 20 years. As the people struggled. To find someone who could lead them.

Someone who would make life good.

[7 : 48] For them. Or at least for the elite leaders. They didn't think to turn to God. They were looking for counterfeit saviors. And the Lord promises them. It will backfire.

Look at verse 9. These political alliances. They're hoping will save them. They've gone up to Assyria. The big superpower of the day. A wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has hired lovers. It's a picture of a senseless animal. In heat. Looking for. Looking to mate with anything. That's what Israel's like. Looking for anything that might provide some security. In this case Assyria.

But look what's going to happen. Verse 10. Though they hire allies among the nations. I will soon gather them up. And the kings and princes will soon writhe. Because of the tribute. 2 Kings 5 verse 19.

We read that Manahem. The king of Israel in this time. And gave the Assyrian king Paul lots and lots of silver. He thought it would bring security. But it didn't.

[8 : 45] They were writhing under the tribute. And yet today. Don't we do the same things. We look for security. In all sorts of places and people. In counterfeit saviors.

In the financial expert. We hope can guarantee our pension. In the doctor. We hope can make us healthy. In the debt counsellor.

Who we hope can make us solvent. In the Christian preacher. Who we think has all the words of wisdom. We put our trust in these counterfeit saviors. Because we're not really trusting.

And listening to the true God. Well as well as counterfeit saviors. There are counterfeit gods. Look at verse 4. With their silver and gold. They made idols. For their own destruction.

You see the picture here. They're using their silver and gold. To cast little statues. Which they're praying and hoping. Can bring them prosperity. Or wealth. Or security. But ultimately.

[9 : 40] They'll lead to destruction. They're counterfeit. They cannot guarantee anything. Now for Israel in those days. The main idol they were worshipping. Was the idol of Baal.

The Canaanite fertility god. So they have their little statues of Baal. They'll go through the worship. Hoping that Baal will then make the land. Fruitful. Make the crops grow. But London is full of idols today isn't it?

Our hearts are idol factories. As one theologian once put it. We constantly find other things. Things other than the living God. To put our trust in.

To put our hope in. To find our identity in. Things we think will bring us security. Or happiness. And yet they actually lead to our destruction. Because none of them can bear the weight we put on them.

Whether that's a relationship. I'll be happy when I'm finally married. Whether it's some fruitfulness in family life. I'll be able to relax when my kids are through university.

[10 : 42] Then I'll know I've succeeded as a parent. Or it can be something like owning a house in this crazy city. I know I've finally made it when I've got my house.

When I've scraped together the deposit. Or whatever it is. Now we can tell what our idols are. If we just stop for a moment and think. What would really cause me anxiety.

If I didn't have it. Or if it was threatened. Or what makes me angry. When someone thwarts me from having what it is I want.

The things that drive our anger. The things that drive our anxieties. Are very often the idols we're clinging to and treasuring. And the Lord says. You should cling to me. To treasure me.

I am your God who has rescued you and loves you. Here's two signs then. Israel weren't really heeding God's word. The counterfeit saviors they were trusting in. The counterfeit gods they were hoping in.

[11 : 39] And finally the counterfeit Christianity if you like. The counterfeit religion they were going through. Look at verses 5 and 6. I can explain what's going on. I have spurned your calf O Samaria. Remember verse 3.

Israel has spurned the good. Spurned the Lord. Now he's spurning their alternative. I spurned your calf O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will you be incapable of innocence?

For it. This calf. Is from Israel. A craftsman made it. It is not God. At the time God had rescued Israel out of Egypt.

Back in Exodus chapter 32. The people. While Moses was away up the mountain. The people decided to build a calf. To represent God. God. And so Aaron.

The high priest at the time. Had made a calf. And said to them. These are your gods over Israel. Who led you out of Egypt. And so they started worshipping the calf. They thought.

[12 : 36] They were still worshipping. The true God. Who had rescued them. But they were ignoring his word. His very second commandment. Was you shall not make an image of me. Because you can't reduce God.

Because you can't reduce God.

To an image. So that as they worshipped this calf. So they thought they were worshipping the true God. But actually they were ignoring his word. And that pattern repeated in Israel's history.

In 1 Kings chapter 12. The first king of Israel. Jeroboam. Had built a couple of calves. And this way of worship. Was still on the minds of the people. But they thought.

They were worshipping God. That's what I call this. Counterfeit Christianity. It has some of the trappings. Some of the ideas. Of the genuine article. And yet actually.

It's mixed in completely. With ideas from the world around. And that happens today. All the time. For example.

[13:31] When the gospel is distorted. When the good news. Of what Jesus Christ has done for us. Is distorted into a message. Of health. And happiness. And self-fulfillment. And self-esteem.

That is counterfeit Christianity. When talk of sin. And death. And suffering. And taking up our cross. When all that is neglected.

To just a happy fulfilled life. Then it's counterfeit Christianity. And sometimes it's hard to spot. Because it has some of the right words. But it misses the death. And resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the centre. It misses his call to repentance. And it's deadly. It's as deadly as this counterfeit religion. The Israelites are going through. Let me give you a little example. Let me give you this quote.

God wants you to have a good life. A life filled with love. Joy. Peace and fulfillment. That doesn't mean it will always be easy. But it does mean it will always be good. We see there are echoes of truth there.

[14:31] God does want us. To have a fulfilled life. Ultimately. But because he loves us. There will be discipline. There will be seasons of difficulty. There will be periods.

Well. There was a lifetime of taking up our cross on Friday. Well. Here's another quote. God knows your value. He sees your potential. See what that's saying?

Have self-esteem. You're special. Of course. There's some truth in it. God loves his people. He gave his son to die for us. But he sees something so much better than your potential.

He's going to remake you and I. Into what we were originally supposed to be. Those quotes by the way come from Joel Alstein's book. Your Best Life. Now.

Seven Steps to Living Your True Potential. It's counterfeit Christianity. No talk of repentance and sin. No talk of taking out your cross to follow Christ.

[15:30] And it's deadly. Look at the end of verse 6. See what God is going to do to this calf of Samaria. This idol they worship. The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces. Counterfeit Christianity cannot save.

Counterfeit gods cannot save. Counterfeit saviors. Saviors. Heroes we put our trust in. Cannot save. They're all. The characteristics.

Of a life lived. Not really listening to God. Not really knowing him. So what's the consequence of all this? Seen the cause. The characteristics. What's the consequence?

Well look at verse 7. For they sow the wind. They will reap the whirlwind. It's a universal principle. We reap what we sow.

We reap what we sow. Actions have consequences. It's true for Israel. It's true for us. Sowing the wind, Hosea says. Because they were investing their life. Pursuing things. That were just air.

[16:27] Just couldn't fulfill. Just couldn't deliver. And so they're going to reap the whirlwind. There will be consequences.

They would get the consequences of their actions. In this case. The whirlwind would be the Assyrian army. Coming to destroy the land in 722 BC. That was God's judgment against them. And it was exactly what God had warned them would happen.

When he had entered into this marriage relationship with them. This covenant relationship. In Deuteronomy chapter 28. He told them all the good things that would happen. How he could bless them if only they were faithful.

How they could have a happy marriage with him. If only they were faithful to him. But he warned them what would happen. If they turned away. If they were unfaithful. He warned them there would be a lack of harvest.

We see that in the second half of verse 7. He warned them enemies would invade. We see that in the first half of verse 8. And he warned them that ultimately they would be defeated. And thrown out the land.

[17:27] Look at verse 14 at the end of the chapter. For Israel has forgotten his maker. And built palaces. And Judah has multiplied fortified cities.

So I will send a fire upon his cities. And it shall devour her strongholds. See the palaces were a symbol of luxury. A symbol of self-reliance. A symbol of self-aggrandizement if you like. We have lots of palaces around London, don't we? Have you noticed all these new buildings that go up? They're all luxury apartments. Have you noticed that? I've never seen anything claimed to be a mediocre apartment. For normal people.

It's ridiculous, isn't it? But that's kind of the way Israel was living. Trusting in their fortified cities to save them. Enjoying their palaces as if they guaranteed a future.

Just to see the development going up in London. People seem to think a crash will never come. And what does the Lord say? He's going to devour it with his fire. Judgment will come.

[18 : 30] Now the same principle works out in our lives now. We're not under that old covenant agreement. We're under a new covenant. There's us who trusted in Jesus Christ.

So God no longer promises us land in the Middle East. And fruitful harvests. But there are things he does promise us. He does promise us joy in Christ. Even when life is hard.

He does promise us if we're in Christ. We will bear fruit. Our characters will be changed to be like Christ. So where we find we're lacking joy.

Where we find we're lacking peace with God that we've promised. Where we find we're lacking fruitfulness. Our lives being changed. Then could it be that actually we're looking somewhere other than the Lord Jesus Christ for our security?

Could it be we're giving in to our counterfeit gods? Could it be this is God's way of calling us back? Because ultimately there is a warning here for us.

[19 : 28] God loves us so much he gives us warnings. He will not let us carry on regardless. He seeks to bring us back to himself. So Hosea chapter 8 is here.

So we can learn the lessons from Israel in Hosea's day. For Israel it was too late. They had broken. They had transgressed the covenant as God said. They were going to experience the judgment God promised.

However. God does not delight in judgment. He does not delight in destroying the wicked. As he says to the prophet Ezekiel. As I live declares the Lord.

I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. But that the wicked turn from his way and live. That's what he wants. He longs for us to come back to him. And that's why we need to hear these scriptures.

We need to make sure we're not like Israel. Forgetting the maker. And for that reason God sent his own son into the world. The Lord Jesus Christ. That we might know him. Jesus was always faithful.

[20 : 29] Jesus was always listening to his father's word. Always did his father's will. And yet he died for us. He died on a cross outside Jerusalem.

Taking the fire of God's just judgment. Against our rebellion. Our rejection. Our transgression. Our forgetting him. Jesus died in our place. The fire fell on him if you like.

So that it need not fall on us. What we need to do to ensure it doesn't fall on us. Is trust in Christ and heed his word. When a fire is sweeping across the grassland plains in America.

The Native American Indians used to burn a patch of ground in front of them. They could stand on that burnt ground. Because the fire wouldn't touch it twice. It would sweep past them. And so it is. God's fire has fallen on Jesus. So if we heed his word and trust in him. We can stand in him. Safe from the judgment. Loved and accepted by the living God.

[21 : 32] The fire will pass us by. But to do that we need to listen to his word. Israel thought they knew God. But they were deluding themselves. Jesus says please don't delude yourselves.

Please listen and respond. Remember those words I read earlier from Matthew 7. Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord. Will enter the kingdom of heaven. By the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

What is that will? The will is that we turn from living for ourselves. Turn from trusting in our counterfeit saviors. Our counterfeit gods. Our counterfeit religion.

And trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. The faithful one. Let's pray.