

Hosea 11

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[0 : 00] I've not kind of gone through Hosea chapter by chapter. I know some of you love that and think it's wrong to do anything different to that. I do think Hosea is one of those books where there are some pretty dark patches in Hosea.

I sat through a kind of 16-part sermon series when I was an assistant minister on Hosea. That was pretty unforgettable, really. And so I'm just aware of wearying you on Sunday night.

And I think actually by taking the chapters we are, we're going to see the big picture of the book anyway. And so Hosea chapter 11, there's probably one more next Sunday.

We've been looking at what Don Carson calls the difficult doctrine of the love of God. And we've seen that, haven't we, in the Old Testament, the book of Hosea. Some people think when it's the last place, you'd look for the love of God.

A lot of people think that God of the Old Testament is fierce, fiery sort of character. And the God of the New Testament, well, that's Jesus, and he's the God of love. And a lot of people think that.

[1 : 05] And I think if you've been with us these last few weeks, you'll have found that there's nowhere else in the Bible, or anywhere else for that matter, that's a more powerful and moving description of the love of God than you find in the book of Hosea.

Aristotle spoke of God as the great unmoved mover. And I sometimes think that we Presbyterians particularly are sometimes more Aristotelian than Christians sometimes.

And Hosea won't let you think like that. Look at verse 8 of Hosea chapter 11. God won't let you think like that. 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 Zeboah? My heart churns. It recoils within me. My compassion grows warm and tender.

That is deep, isn't it? That's not emotionalism. But it is deep emotion. There's nothing sentimental here. Emotionalism isn't a good thing.

[2 : 16] And what you have here is a God who is in touch with his emotions, if I can put it like that. It's a God who feels profoundly. C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* says, When Christianity says that God loves mankind, it means that God really actively loves mankind.

Not that he has some disinterested, partial concern for our welfare. But that in hard to swallow an unbelievable truth, we are the actual object of his great love.

You asked for a loving God and you have one, says C.S. Lewis. The great spirit that you so lightly invoked, the lord of terrible aspect, is in fact present.

Not a senile benevolence that drowsily wishes you to be happy. Not the cold philanthropy of a conscientious magistrate. Not the care of a host who feels responsible for the comfort of his gas. But the consuming fire. The lord that made worlds. Persistent as artists for his work. Provident and venerable as a father's love for a child.

[3 : 21] Jealous, inexorable, exacting as love between a man and a woman. And both those images are in Hosea chapter 11. The love of a father for a child.

And the love of a man for a woman. Hosea was told, do you remember, but to love Goma even though she'd been unfaithful to him. And because God wants us to know how churned up inside, how he feels about unfaithfulness when we go chasing after other gods to find our sense of satisfaction or worth or identity.

He gives us this chapter. Let me try and illustrate it like this. Imagine Goma is your friend. She's a good friend and she comes to you and you might try to help her.

You might sit up with her and you talk to her about her troubles three nights in a row. Three nights in a row until 2am in the morning.

What do you do on the fourth night when Goma's name comes up as a call on your phone? You click her, don't you? Missed call or reject or decline.

[4 : 36] You put her onto the answering machine. You pretend you're not home. Because her troubles are not really your troubles. Her wounds are not your wounds.

Your heart is not bound up so strongly, so closely, that her wounds become your wounds. But if you're married to her, that's a different story, isn't it?

If you're married to her, her happiness is your happiness. Her despair, your despair. Her wounds become your wounds.

And so God says to Hosea, Go marry Goma. She'll break your heart. Because I want you to know how I feel. Just like when God told Abraham, do you remember we talked about it the other week, to take Isaac and sacrifice him on Mount Moriah.

Genesis 22. He didn't just say, can you go and take Isaac and put him to death? Do you remember what he said? He said, take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love. Because I want you, Abraham, to know what it's going to cost me to fulfill my promise.

[5 : 51] That you will be a great nation, and you will be a blessing to all the nations. The promise that I've made is not a cheap promise. I want you to know what it's going to cost you, what it's going to cost me. So give your son, your only son, whom you love.

Because I am going to give up my son, my only son, my son with whom I'm well pleased, the Lord Jesus, to fulfill this promise. And there's something like that happening in Hosea. Go and marry Goma, he says, and you'll begin to understand how I feel.

For my people. Now we've looked at that. We've spent some time trying to look at the metaphor of an unfaithful wife and a jealous husband. God isn't jealous of anything.

He is jealous for his people. And we've seen that. But here in chapter 11, there's another metaphor that God reveals himself, not only as a jealous spouse, but as a parent in pain. John White wrote a book about that, didn't he, in the 70s.

He wrote a book called Parents in Pain. And there's no greater pain, is there, for a parent when your child goes off the rails. What do they say?

[7 : 00] They say this, when they're young, they tread on your toes. When they're older, they trample on your heart. Some people in our church have experienced that. And that's what's happening in this chapter.

Look at verse 8 again. My heart recoils, he says. My heart churns up within me. Because of you. And so God is going to show his love for us in this metaphor of a parent in pain.

There are three things about the Father's heart of God. Verses 1-4, it is tender. And verses 5-9, it is tough. And in verses 10-11, it is triumphant.

Can you see, first of all, notice how tenderly God speaks. When Israel was a child, I loved him. The word Abba, it means daddy.

It's slightly different than that, but it is that. The French would say papa. Derek Kidner, in his commentary on Hosea, says, when we speak of God as father, we may hesitate in case we read too much into the word.

[8 : 19] But he says, our chief danger is in reading too little from it. In verse 1, when Israel was a child, I loved him. I loved him. And out of Egypt, I called my son.

Here's the big, scary God of the Old Testament. And he's thumbing through the family photos. Here is a God, and he's walking down memory lane almost nostalgically.

You know those times when you get the family album? It's a tragedy, isn't it, with digital photos?

You don't have the family album, but some of us still have them. And you get down the family album, and you look through, and every photo tells a memory.

Or, well, you can't remember who it is or what they were. But we know that, don't we? But here is God looking at the photos. God says, when Israel was a child, there he is on his bike.

When Israel was a child, I loved him. Russell Moore is a Baptist minister in the US. He's written a book called Adopted for Life.

[9 : 32] And he reflects on his two sons, Benjamin and Timothy, how they came into his life. This is what he says. For a couple of seconds, my mind flashed back to the first time I ever saw those two boys.

They were lying in excrement and vomit, covered in heat blisters and flies, in an orphanage in a little mining community in some part of Russia. Maria, that's his wife, and I had applied to Adopt and

had gone on the first of two trips, not knowing who, if anyone, we would find waiting for us. Immediately upon landing in the former Soviet Union, I wondered if we'd made the worst mistake of our lives. Sitting in a foreign airport with the smell of European perfume, human sweat, and cigarette smoke wafting all around us.

Maria and I looked at one another and recommitted to God that we would trust him and would adopt whoever he directs us to, regardless of what medical or emotional problems they might have. A Russian judge told us that she had two grey-eyed boys picked out for us both, both of whom who'd been abandoned by their mothers to a hospital in a little village about an hour from where we were staying.

Sure enough, the orphanage authorities catalogued a list of terrifying medical problems, including fetal alcohol syndrome, for one if not both. We looked at each other as if to say, this is what the Lord has for us, so here we go.

[10:53] The nurse led us up some stairs down a dank hallway into a room with two beds. I can still see the younger of the two now, Timothy rocking up and down on the bars of his crib, grinning wildly, widely. The older, now Benjamin, was more reserved, stroking my five o'clock shadow with his hand, and seeing, I came to realise, a man most probably for the first time in his life.

Both the boys had matted hair, their hair matted down on their heads, and one of them had crossed eyes. Both of them moved slowly and rigidly, almost like stop-motion clay animated figures in a Christmas TV special from the 1970s.

And we loved them. We loved them both at an intuitive and most primal level from the very first moment. The transformation of these two ex-orphans into the sons I see every day of my life with Lego toys and construction paper drawings motivates me to write this book.

And so God likewise looks back to the day when he brought home his son. Out of Egypt, I called my son, and he remembers that day when he came home with his child. Look at verses three and four. It was I that taught Ephraim to walk. Ephraim was a pet name for Israel. You've got pet names for your children, isn't it? You don't call your children by their full names all the time.

[12:10] Look at verses three and four. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk. I took them up by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of kindness, with bands of love.

And I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws. And I bent down to them and fed them. When he grazed his knee, I kissed it better.

Don't you remember the mealtimes? Food everywhere except in the mouth. That's the scene any family will recognize this. It's a scene of warmth and of tenderness.

This is the great scary God of the Old Testament. Talking about his people. And there's such warmth and tenderness here. It's why people go to the photograph album.

It's why people take photographs to capture moments like this. And God has such precious memories of his dealings with his people when Israel was a child.

[13:13] But why Israel? Why Israel when there were so many messed up kids in the orphanage? Why Israel? Why not Egypt?

Why not Egypt? Straddling the great river Nile. It's rolling and flamboyant history. Why not Egypt? With its art and wealth.

Why not Assyria? You know, that great symbol of power in the ancient world. Or Phoenicia, the brilliant sea-faring trading nation. Why not?

Why Israel? Why did God choose Israel? You probably know in Deuteronomy 7, the Lord says this, the Lord your God has chosen you out of all the people of the earth to be his favoured people, his treasured possession.

But why? Why? Why? When he says, the Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you're more numerous than other people, because you were bigger, because you're the fewest of the people.

[14:21] So why? Well, because I loved you. It was because he loved you. Why did the Lord love you? He loved you because he loved you.

Because he loved you. Because he loved you. There's no reason in this. You're not lovable. Let me give you this illustration.

It's a little bit dangerous. My wife says to me, you love me, don't you? I say, I love you. She says, why do you love me? And you've got to think about that, haven't you?

You've got to be careful at that point. I say, well, you're great, aren't you? You're gorgeous. I say, you've got a gorgeous figure or something like that, isn't it?
And she says, well, what happens if I've had four or five children? And I get into middle age, will you still love me then? Of course I will. You've got such a great personality.

[15 : 24] We've had such fun together over the years. It's been great. And then she says, well, what happens if I get depressed? What happens if I go through a period of depression? Will you still love me when I'm 64?

And I say, well, of course I will, because we've got such great memories together. We've had such a great life, such memories together. And then she says, what if I lose my memory? Will you still love me then?

What does she need to hear? She needs to know, I love you because I love you. Because I love you. And that's what God is saying to Israel. It's not because you are more numerous or more spiritual or greater or that you had potential or anything like that.

I set my affection upon you. And that is what we call the special, distinguishing love of God. He makes the sun to rise on the just and the unjust.

He causes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. And God has a general love for all mankind. That is right. God loves his creation, but he has a distinguishing, special love for his people.

[16 : 32] And it's not because of anything in us. It's entirely undeserved. It's like those messed up kids in that orphanage. There's nothing in us to merit such love.

When Israel was a child, I loved him. And out of Egypt, I called my son. But toddlers become teenagers. And Ephraim is a child no longer.

Like some aloof and scornful adolescent, Israel doesn't want to know God anymore. So look at verses 5 to 7. The story goes full circle, doesn't it? And verse 1, Out of Egypt I called my son. But if you look back, if you look at verse 5, the son wants to go back to Egypt. So my brother comes to London, and he speaks so loudly on the tube that the whole of the central line can hear him. I think, well, you can take the boy out of Swansea, but you can't take Swansea out of the boy. Can you? We say that. It's a bit like that with Israel. And God took them out of Egypt, but their hearts are still with Egypt.

[17 : 41] God says they refuse to repent. Look at verse 7. My people are bent on turning away from me, and though they call out to the Most High, the Almighty, He shall not raise them up at all.

You see, the book of Hosea, it's a wonderful love story, but it's an incredible warning to the evangelical church, the Reformed church. The kind of background I have is the kind of Calvinistic Methodist heritage, kind of 18th century, George Whitefield, Wesley, Donna Rowland, Howell Harris.

It's a rich heritage. There was great revival. And yet that denomination over the past 50 years has just shrunk rapidly. It's rapidly disappearing.

That's how God views, I think, our historic denominations. God, very often, with historic denominations, you look back and He grew them, He blessed them, and He looked after them over all those years, but they're determined to turn away from Him.

So now, they're more concerned about being politically correct than being biblically faithful. Even though they call me, can you see it? They call me the Most High. They still do that. They call Him the Almighty.

[18 : 53] I will not raise them up. Look what it says in verse 2 about these people, verse 1.

When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away. They kept burning sacrifices to the Baals and burning offerings to idols, and maybe that is you tonight.

Maybe you are on the run from the God of your forefathers, the God of your parents. Maybe tonight you've got a history with Him from earlier days.

You've got fond memories of times when God seemed so close, when God picked you up and God dried your tears. And maybe you can say with the hymn writer, what peaceful hours I once enjoyed, how sweet their memories still, but they've left an aching void the world can never fill.

Sometimes rebellious teenagers, they've only got eyes, haven't they, to see their parents' faults. And they're blind to their own faults. Blind to what their parents have sacrificed for them.

[20 : 07] And we can be that way with God. Not that God has any faults, but we can blame Him for our unhappiness about ourselves. And God keeps calling to us and calling, and the harder He calls,

the harder we run.

And when you have to run away from God, you've got to run to somewhere, isn't it? You've got to run to something, to the Baals or to the false gods. When you have a Jesus upbringing, if I put it like that, and a Jesus background, and an experience of the Lord in previous years, when you run from Him, you will run to something.

You'll find something to throw yourself into, to get away from Him. Maybe exercise. Maybe music. It might be making money. It might be science.

It might be sports. It might be computer games. It might be work. Running away from God. And so I want to see, I want to bring you into the second thing.

God tenderly loves you. God is seeking you out. He longs to come into an intimate relationship with you. He wants to embrace you as His child. And the more you run away from Him, the more determined God is to go after you.

[21 : 20] And so His love is tender, but His love is tough. It's a love that will not let us go. So look at verses 8 to 10. And they are some of the most amazing words in all the Bible. 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 Zeboim? My heart recoils within me. My compassion grows warm and tender.

Those cities that, we don't know them, but Adma and Zeboim, they were the other cities that were destroyed when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. How can I hand you over?

How can I make you like that? How can I make you like the cities that perished in the plain with Sodom and Gomorrah? How can I treat you like that? That's what you deserve, verse 9. I will execute my burning anger.

I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not a man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. He doesn't know whether to, he doesn't know whether to smack them or hug them. They deserve a good hiding, but his heart goes out to them.

[22 : 25] He sees them hell-bent on destroying themselves, and it breaks his heart. Jack Miller and Barbara Miller, they wrote a book, Barbara was Jack's daughter. If you've got runaway kids, rebellious kids, or breaking your heart, it's a good book.

And in that book, Barbara speaks of leaving the Christian faith at 18, and how the Lord wonderfully drew her back. She said, Mom and Dad, I don't want your rules and your morals, and I don't want to act like a Christian anymore.

And I'm not going to. She declared that at age 18, and her father tried desperately to reason with her. He was a seminary professor at Westminster. And Barbara grew more resentful choosing a path of immorality that only deepened her parents' pain.

And this is what her father wrote. He wrote this, I am not ignorant of human depravity, but I had long denied that it could exist in our family. And that reality forced me to confront my own, to seek forgiveness, admit my inability to change my wayward daughter, and to begin loving Barbara on God's terms.

You see, if it was you, and if it was me, we'd start making excuses. You know the kind of thing that parents say, isn't it? It's not the lifestyle that I would approve of, but it's what they want.

[23 : 48] And I'll do what I can to support them. But God doesn't talk like that. He says, I am God and not a man. I am the holy one amongst you.

And if you've ever been in that position with a runaway child, you will know what it feels like, that you can neither condone what they're doing nor condemn them.

You can neither condone nor condemn. So what do you do? Do I give up on them? They're so determined to destroy themselves, do I just give up on them or give in to them? That's God's dilemma.

He can't give in. He can't turn a blind eye to sin. He can't sweep it under the carpet and pretend it doesn't matter. He is a man. He's not a man. He is God. He cannot give in to his people's rebellion, but at the same time, he doesn't want to give up on them because of his compassion and his love for them.

So here you've got a window in Hebrews 11 right into the heart of God, right into the drama of the Bible. There is anger and there's love together in the heart of God.

[24 : 57] So how can it be resolved? That's the issue right at the heart of the Bible. It's the tension that runs through the Scriptures. How can God be just and at the same time the justifier of the

ungodly?

That divine dilemma between holiness and justice on one hand and love and compassion on the other. And how is it going to be resolved? Well, in the end, it's resolved within the character of God. Look at verse 9. What happens when the Holy One comes amongst you? What actually happens when the Holy One comes and sets foot in this world?

What happens when Jesus gets off his throne in heaven and steps out of eternity into the pages of history? Remember what he says? God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

And how is that going to happen? How is that possible? John Edison wrote this great hymn. He says, At the cross of Jesus' pardon is complete. Love and justice mingle. Truth and mercy meet. [26 : 06] Though my sins condemn me, Jesus died instead. There is full forgiveness in the blood he shed. You see, the cross is both good news and bad news, isn't it?

The cross of Jesus Christ, it shows you how bad your sin is. Sin is so bad that when sin was found by imputation on the person of Jesus, God turns his face away.

That's how serious our sin is. It shows how bad we are. But at the same time, the cross shows you how far God is willing to go in his love for you. He has not spared his own but gave him up for us all. God's love is tender and it's tough. And it will not let us go. John says, Having loved his own, he loved them to the end. He loved them to the limits, to the full extent of his love.

God could not love you anymore. It's a tender love, it's a tough love, it's triumphant. There is a roar of triumph. Verse 10. They shall go after the Lord and he will roar like a lion.

[27 : 14] And when he roars, his children shall come, trembling from the west. The message of the Bible is that ultimately the Lord Jesus wins, isn't it?

And he is victorious. And he has defeated death and he has put an end to sin and he has defeated the evil one. You will see in sports games, there's not been much sport on TV the last couple of days, but when a sports team wins against the odds and it's a close game and the final whistle goes, what do they do?

They roar, don't they? They roar. You see it in their faces. The winner roars. And Jesus roars. He's destroyed the works of the devil. He's kicked the winning goal. He's scored the winning try. And now you will hear his mighty roar. And that is the gospel going out into all the world.

Aslan has come back from the dead and Aslan roars. And his children come trembling to him. They come home from the far country. Look at verse 11. They shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from the land of Assyria and I will return them to their homes, declares the Lord.

[28 : 37] It's mass migration. It's an incredible thing, isn't it? The birds fly halfway across the world to go home. They're coming home from the far country. There's a homing instinct.

And that's what God is doing tonight through his gospel. As it's preached, he is calling his people. He roars in the preaching of the gospel and his people come to him.

And so, I am a gospel optimist. Last night was a great talk, wasn't it, by Sharon James. I think the problem is it can leave you feeling so depressed and so anxious.

What's it going to mean in the future? But we must be gospel optimists. I hope you believe in the certain success of the gospel. I believe that Christ will see the travail of his soul and he will be satisfied.

And we are living right now when the lion is roaring. And when the gospel is being preached throughout the world and his people are coming to him through the preaching of the gospel.

[29 : 49] There are remarkable stories coming out of Ukraine, aren't there? Of people coming to faith in those underground hiding places. Coming to the lion of Judah, the lion of Judah, the lamb who was slain.

John Newton describes how this happened in a letter to an aristocrat on November 5th, 1774. He writes this, We are his by every tie and right.

He made us, he redeemed us, he reclaimed us from the hand of our enemies. And we are his by our own voluntary surrender of ourselves. For though we once slighted, despised and opposed him, he made us willing in the day of his power.

He knocked at the door of our hearts, but we, at least I, barred and fastened it against him as much and as long as possible. But when he revealed his love, we could stand it no longer. And that's what Hosea is talking about, the tender, tough, triumphant love of God revealed in Christ.

I love what Derek Kidna says. He says this, The Bible never takes the warmth out of love and the fire out of anger or the audacity out of grace. Triumphant love.

[30 : 59] We'll sing in a minute. Love to the loveless shown that we might lovely be. So let me finish with this. If that is how God loves you, tenderly, toughly, triumphantly, how must you love him in return?

Well, surely, deeply, passionately, wholeheartedly. I fear that for many people, Christianity is just, it's a form of mental assent, isn't it? It's like filling in a form, ticking a box.

That's their Christianity. But the Bible says we are to love him because he first loved us. With a love that's tender and true with all our heart and mind and soul. Wholeheartedly, head over heels, in love with him.

I've not heard it for ages, but occasionally, you meet very, very annoying Christians who say, I don't have to like you, I only have to love you.

Have you ever heard that? It's like, I can beat you up without causing you pain. It's the most ridiculous comment. It's a cop-out. There needs to be warmth and there needs to be affection in our relationships to one another.

[32 : 08] It's not just politeness. And yes, I'm aware that it's a work in progress and some people are hard to like. But we're to work on it.

Because the Bible tells us, it commands us to love one another with a pure heart fervently, not just putting up with one another. And if God has loved us like that, that's how we are to love one another.

Let me say this to you as I finish for about, I've said that about three times tonight. God doesn't want you to go through the rest of your life wondering. You know, the girl picking the petals off a daisy, he loves me, he loves me not, he loves me, he loves me not.

Not sure. Some days you think I've had a good day and God loves me, but the next day you're down in the dumps and you think, well, surely he doesn't love me. God does not want you to live like that. God wants you to be secure in his love and he wants you to be assured in his love.

He wants you to know the feelings that he has for you. That's why the book of Isaiah is in your Bible. He doesn't want you wondering, he wants you wondering.

[33 : 20] What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul? Let's pray.

Thank you.