

How shall I give thee up Ephraim

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[0 : 00] Let's turn again to Hosea chapter 8, chapter 11, sorry, and verse 8. Hosea 11 and verse 8.

How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? Now Hosea, as all of us know, was a prophet. We tend to think of prophets as men and women who simply foretold the future.

They were foretellers. And of course, that was a part of their function. They did predict and foretell what would one day come to pass.

And I suppose that above all, they foretold the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, and our Savior. But prophets weren't first and foremost foretellers.

Their primary job was to be spokesman for God. They had an audience with God. And in that audience, God shared with them his own secrets.

[1 : 08] And those covered many aspects of God's truth. To see that, you should recall that the most important prophet was, of course, Moses.

And Moses was not first and foremost a foreteller. He was first and foremost a lawgiver and a teacher. And so those prophets, they stood in God's presence.

They had an audience with God. And God told them things to pass on to the people of Israel.

Sometimes they were told to pass on God's commandments, like Moses on Mount Sinai.

Sometimes they were told to pass on God's judgment and God's critique of his own ancient people. And sometimes that was very devastating.

And sometimes God would pass on great blocks of teaching and show them something of his own purpose of instruction.

[2 : 19] And sometimes God showed them something about himself. And God gave them a window into his own heart and into his own soul.

And they then went forth. And they opened that window to the people. And that's what we have in this passage before us tonight.

We have a prophetic word. Which is not a word of prediction or foretelling. But is instead a word that opens a window into the heart and the mind and the soul of God.

And shows us what kind of God he is. And I want to spend our time together this evening just trying to look through this window into God's heart.

To see something of what God wants us to see. In the depths of God's own being. We notice first of all that this is the God to whom we owe absolutely everything.

[3 : 38] We owe everything to this God. How shall I give thee up? And how important that I is.

Because it's been emphasised, underlined from the very beginning of the chapter. This word I has kept recurring.

As God drives home through the prophet all that he has done for this people. Go back to verse 1.

When he was a child God says. Then I loved him. And I called my son out of Egypt. And then verse 3.

I taught Ephraim also to go. I taught him to go. And then he says. I healed him. And so he says.

[4 : 40] I loved him. And I called him. And I taught him to walk. And I healed him. And I drew them with cords of a man with bands of love.

There he was. The shepherd, the herdsman. Going before the flock. Not driving but leading. And leading with the cords of love.

And I was to them. As those that took off the yoke and their jaws. And in the words. The weary beast at the end of the day. Some of you in the old days.

Worked with horses. Ploughing and harrowing. Taking home pizza and so on. At the end of the day. I took off the yoke. And I fed them. And I was so loving to them.

So in all those ways he says. You owe everything to me. I have been so much to you. I loved you.

[5 : 41] And I called you. And I led you. And I healed you. And I fed you. And I took off the yoke. At the end of the day. I was father to you.

And I was mother to you. And I was nursemaid to you. And I was teacher to you. And I was the one who pastored you.

And tended you. And shepherded you. I was all of these things to you. Ephraim. On Israel. Says the Lord. And so he says. You owe me everything. And isn't that true tonight?

Of ourselves. Gathered here. Isn't this great I that God speaks. Not relevant to every single soul. It's relevant to those of us tonight. Who are here as God's people. And God's children. We know. That we owe everything to God.

[6 : 44] It all began with God's love. He loved us. With an everlasting love. Loved us in all our sins. In all our repugnancy.

In all our ugliness. And wrote down our names. In the book. Of eternal life. And for us. God gave his own son.

We who were his enemies. He himself. Took the initiative. In making peace. Between ourselves and him. And he bore the cost.

His son bore it. And the father bore it. And the holy spirit bore it. And we bore nothing of the cost of atonement.

And the cost of our own sin. Bearing. He bore it all. He bore the cost. Of reconciliation. And he called us.

[7 : 44] In the wonder of his grace. When many of us. Had no word of God. But he called us. And he convinced us of our sins.

And he showed us. The glory. And the beauty of the saviour. And he drew us. With those bands of love. And when we were dead.

In trespasses and sins. Blind. And deaf. And spiritually impotent. And utterly incapable. Of repentance. Or conversion.

Or turning to God. Or believing in Jesus. Or seeing anything at all. Lovely. Or attractive. In him. We were dead. And God himself.

Gave us life. And tonight. At a spiritual level. We walk. And we breathe. And we see. And hear. And feel.

[8 : 40] Spiritually. Only because. Of what God has done. And every believer. In this audience tonight. Knows that. Knows it.

Not simply because the Bible says so. But knows it. From the depths. Of her own experience. This. Is the way that it's been. As Paul says.

It pleased God. And that's the only reason. Why. Tonight. We. Are final to the Lord. And saved by his grace.

Because. Of this. Great. I. To whom we owe. Absolutely everything. And then. Down all those years. He has kept us.

And he has fed us. And he's encouraged us. And he's kept us going. And given us strength. And sometimes. We've stumbled and fallen.

[9 : 36] And he's picked us up again. And sometimes. We have hurt him deeply. And he's taken us back. And sometimes. We have just collapsed. In a heap on the road.

And we've said to God. I'm sorry. But I just. Can't go further. Not a single. Other step. Can I take. And then he's.

Picked us up. And he's kept us going. And we've gone off the road. And he's put us back on the road. And he's restored our souls. And put fresh life.

And fresh light. Into our life. And into. Into our eyes. And so we owe. Absolutely everything to him. And if we have grown at all.

And we probably don't think we have. But if we have. It's only because. He has fed us. And he has nourished us. And because he has shown us.

[10 : 33] Day after day. Week after week. Something more. Of the glory. And the beauty. And the sheer loveliness of Jesus. And that's why.

We have kept going. And we've kept growing. Because he has been so solicitous. In all his care. And all his tenderness. And that's the Lord's people.

But. It applies too. To those of us tonight here. Who are not Christians. Because we too. Owe. Everything to God.

We owe to him. All that we are. And we owe to him. All that we have. I think. On the prodigal son. As he went off. On that. Great adventure. As he sawed. To the far country. And oh. How proud he was. As he strode.

[11:34] Down the road. Into his own great future. And all that he had. And all that he had. And all that money in his pocket. And all that great education.

And upbringing. And all that culture. That he was carrying with him. And his throne out. With his head high. And his chest out. With all that vision.

And all that hope. Down the road. Into his own great future. And all that he had. As he went. He owed to God.

Everything he had. That prodigal. Ode to his father. The suit. On his back. And the money in his pocket. And the education.

And the confidence. And the culture. And all the hope. And all the optimism. He owed them all. To the father. On whom. He was turning his back.

[12:37] And we have ourselves. Each one of us. We have strolled. Through and out of adolescence. Into our own future.

And we've gone down. That same road. Turning our backs. Perhaps. On all the culture. Of fathers. And mothers. And forebears.

And we have seen. Such a great future. For ourselves. And we've had stars. In our eyes. And perhaps. We've taken the ferry. Or taken the aircraft.

And off we went. Turning your backs. And so much. And yet off we went. Carrying with us. All the spoils.

Of our own island culture. And all the riches. Of our own heritage. And carrying with us too.

[13:33] All the gifts that God gave us. The gift of health. Of education. All the benefits of common grace. And some of us have gone out perhaps.

Greatly gifted. Great gifts of intellect. Great gifts of creativity. Perhaps tonight here some. Splendidly gifted.

Because God has been so good. And all these things said. About the great I. In those opening verses of this chapter. Apply to you.

God has been so good. Perhaps you're a poet. Perhaps you're a singer. Perhaps a musician. Perhaps a writer. Of short stories.

Perhaps a great athlete. Great academic. Gates of imagination. Great manual dexterity. Great craftsman. Where has it all come from?

[14:35] But from this God. God. God. God saying to you. I gave you everything that you have.

I gave you even those gifts perhaps. With which you have mocked my church. And those gifts with which you have lofted my son.

But I gave them to you. Each and every one of them. Every good and perfect gift comes. From the father of lights. With whom there is no variableness.

No shadow of turning. And so we owe. All that we have to God. He is the God to whom we owe. All that we have. And then there is this.

He is the God. Who never lets go. And that perhaps is the great. Central burden of these words. How shall I give thee up?

[15:35] I frame. How shall I hand thee over? How can I do it? And he says it because. Everything is screaming at God.

Give her up. Let her go. And walk out. You remember the background here. With Hosea and God. Now it's God looking at Israel's own behaviour. And all the despite. That she has done to him.

And all the gratitude. He had done so much for her. And she's disgraced him. And she's gone after all these gods.

And all these bales. And all these asteroids. And every mountain and hill. And every farm staring in a seal. There was an altar to some Baal.

[16:36] To some other god. Apart from Jehovah. The God of their fathers. Such idolatry. Such ingratitude.

Such sin. Such impurity. Such violence. Such incrust. Such incrust. Such incrust. Such incrust. Such incrust. Among God's people. And it was all saying to God. Give her up.

Give her over. Turn your back on her. Because she doesn't deserve you. And she's not worth it. That's what everything was saying to God. Give her over. And let her go. That he doesn't let go.

Those of us tonight who are God's children. We are the great beneficiaries. Of this steadfast loyalty. Of our covenant God.

[17 : 36] The God. Who never lets go. The love. That never lets go. I didn't rehearse to you. The provocations.

That we have offered to God. We have been ungrateful. We have defied him. We have disgraced him. We have violated.

So many of us rules. And of us norms. We have gone after other gods. The God of money. The God of prestige.

The God of pleasure. Above all. The great God of self. We have worshipped ourselves. And yet God hasn't let us go.

Is it not tonight. An occasion of amazement to us. That God hasn't abandoned us. But that he is still there for us.

[18 : 41] In our backsliding. In our fallings. In our near apostasies. That he is still there. Remember the great hymn.

By George Matheson. Oh love that will not let me go. Remember the background. I don't want to sentimentalise.

But he was a young man. Called to preach the gospel. Unstruck with blindness in his youth. And I see. Lay there languishing.

In hopelessness and self-pity. Those great thoughts occur to him. This thought. Of a love. That never lets go.

Oh love that will not let me go. I rest my weary soul. In thee. I give thee back.

[19 : 45] The life I owe. That in its ocean depths. Its flow. May richer. Fuller.

Be. He had felt. His blindness. As the stroke of God.

He had felt reduced to uselessness. And to nothing. Because of his blindness.

But as he looked. Through sightless eyes. Into the depths of his own providence. He saw this mighty truth.

Of a love. That never lets go. And that was there with them. Even in his calamity. And it's true.

[20 : 44] Of all of us. Here tonight. Some of. Who you have been. Through so much. And for you.

This is a mighty.

And a pertinent. And relevant truth. The love. That has not. Let go. And in response. To that.

God. I give thee. Back. The life I owe. He had. In a way. Taken his life back.

He had given it to God. And now he wanted it back. Because God had been so bad. To him. So he took his life back. And he said. Now Lord. I'm giving it back.

To you again. The life I owe. This life. With a blind. Sightless eyes. I give them back. To you.

[21 : 39] To the love. That will not let me go. And I give it back. So that. In the ocean depths. Of that love.

My life. May richer. Fuller. Flow. Those of you who. Know the sea.

Know the influence. Of the Gulf Stream Drift. Those. Warm currents. That come from the. Central. Western Atlantic. And that. Manage to wash. Upon these shores. And moderate. A warmer climate. You can't see it.

In the ocean. Ocean. And it's that kind of image. We have here. The ocean of God's love. And our lives.

[22 : 39] As a stream. In that ocean. I give thee back. The life I owe. That in its ocean depths.

Its flow. It's flow. May richer. Fuller be. We need. We need. Tonight.

For tonight. And for tomorrow. The present. And the future. To plant. To plant your feet. On this rock. That God's love.

Never. Lets go. And that come. What may. We must never. Never interpret. Any other experiences. As if they meant. That God. Had walked. Out on us. Or God. Had turned. His back. Because. He never walks.

[23 : 36] Out. And he never. Lets go. That. Is the way. That he is. But I want to say.

This is where. It applies. To those of you. Who are not yet. God's children. That is those. Who have not yet. Made that choice.

Made that decision. Those who are still. Holding out. Against God. That God has still. Not let go.

And God has not yet. Walked out. On you. God has. Granted you. All your lives. So many privileges.

And God has given you. His gospel. And God has told you. A story. That great story. That began. In the beginning. When God said.

[24 : 34] Let there be light. And continue down. To Calvary. The empty tomb. On the day of Pentecost. Christ. And you know. The story.

You know. God's story. It's not a short story. It's a greater story. Imaginable. God's eternal story. And God has shown you.

Not least from this pulpit. Down through the years. And those recent months. And God has shown you. The glory. And the beauty. Of a son. And God has turned him round.

Before you. From up here. And showed you. His every sign. He has shown you. The face. Of Jesus. And the glory. Of God.

In that very face. You have seen. The love of God. Shine. In the face. Of Jesus. You have heard. The story. Of the cross. Of the sin. Mary.

[25 : 31] Of God's own son. You have seen. The Lord Christ. As God. In his word. And through servants. Has.

Have. Has proclaimed it to you. And God has. God has. Offered you. His own son. And God has. Invited you. To his own son. And God has. Exhorted you. To come. To his own son. And God has. Plead with you.

God almost. On bended knee. Asking you. I pray. You be reconciled. To God. And it may be. That the angels. Are saying to God. They've had enough. These people. Down there. In Garibust. Abba.

[26 : 25] Father. You've been. Pleading with them. For so long. You've shown them. Your glory. From every side.

You've shown them. Your love. From every side. You've given them. Every opportunity. You've been. So admirably. And so incredibly. Patient with them.

But surely. Now you recognize. That it's all. Pointless. Because. They're so hard. And so. Obdurate. And they're set. On defying you.

And they're set. On their own. Damnation. And God. Saying. How. Can I give them over. How. Can I. Abandon. It. And so. One more time. God. Is pleading. And God. Is beseeching. And so.

[27 : 19] There he is. In all the glory. Of that love. That never lets go. And never gives up. And what a model. It is. For ourselves. Because we give up.

So easily. In every one. Our own. Relationships. And so often. We give up. On the very church itself.

All those. Mighty dreams. We had. When first we began. To follow the Lord. And expectations. Of God's people. And then.

Perhaps. Something. Arise. As something. Goes wrong. And the church. Somehow. Offends us. And we preach.

All love. That will not let me go. And yet. We don't reciprocate. That love ourselves. To God. And to his cause. It's been one of the great problems.

[28 : 20] In the church. In Scotland. That people have felt. Afree. To separate. From the bride. Of Christ. And the church.

Of God. For all kinds. Of trivial reasons. And sometimes. For no reason. At all. There was a great German.

Martyr theologian. Called. Bonhoeffer. Who said once. Never complain. Never complain. About your church. He said. Don't even complain. To God. About her. Don't even complain. To God. About her. Of course. Sometimes. The prophets. By God's directors. Spoke harsh words.

[29 : 15] About the church. And sometimes. The preacher. The preacher. Has to speak warnings. To the church. And yet. It's such a tremendous principle.

Don't complain. About your church. Don't complain. Even to God. About the church. And I've said to you. Stand on this great wrong.

Oh love. That will not let me go. And put another beside it. That you.

Will never give up. On the church of God. Oh. Someday. She'll hurt you. And someday. She'll seem to despise you. And someday. She may cause. Incredible pain. But she is the church of God.

[30 : 14] Purchased. By his own blood. And I would love to inject. Into your Scottish Presbyterianism.

This great principle. That we never give up on the church. And that we never let go. Your God shall be my God.

And your people shall be my people. We must reciprocate. The divine commitment to ourselves. God says.

I can't let them go. And we say. We can't walk out. On the church of God. And on the people of God.

God. And so we've seen. That this is the God. To whom we owe everything. And this is the God. Who never gives up.

[31 : 14] And thirdly. This. This is the God. Who feels deeply. The God who feels deeply. Now I know that.

There's been a long tradition. In the Christian church. Going back to. About the second century. Almost 2000 years ago. That. That God.

God doesn't have feelings. God doesn't feel. God doesn't have feelings. God doesn't have feelings. God doesn't have feelings. And that came in because. The church fell under influence.

Of. A stoic philosophy. To which. Fearing. Or passion. Was a sign of weakness. And so they said. That even. The human nature of Jesus. Had to be. Without passion. Because passion was weakness. And then I turn. From that. To this great passage.

[32 : 14] In the word of God. It said. Not some philosopher. But here we are. In the word of God. And there he talks. In verse 9. I will not execute.

The fierceness of mine anger. For I am God. And not man. And he says. There. Before that. In verse 8. My heart is turned.

Within me. My repentings. Are kindled together. And you see. The depth of the feeling there. The fierceness.

Of mine anger. The fierceness. Of the anger of God. And then as God. Contemplates this terrible. Situation. With his church. How can I give thee over? For in a way. Justice is saying. To hope. But you have no option. But to give it over.

[33 : 13] And to walk out. You have no option. But he says. I am God. I am not man. He says. I am the holy one. In the midst of you.

And therefore. My heart. Is turned. Within me. My repentings. Or my compassions. Are turned together. And we have this.

This marvelous picture. Of the heart of God. Churning and turning. And this great. Conflict.

Of emotions. My. My compassions. Are heaving. And my compassions. Are in turmoil. In turmoil. It's the word of God.

It's the language. That God has chosen. To describe himself. This is not. Some indifferent. God. Who doesn't care.

[34 : 12] Or who doesn't mind. This is a God. Capable of fierce anger. And this is a God. Who is capable. Of the most tempestuous compassion.

And this is a God. Whose heart. Is churning over. In the intensity. Of emotion. That is the kind of God. That he is.

And that's the God. Who is present here. Tonight. In his own word. And in the heart. Of each one. Of his children. This God.

Who feels deeply. Why in a way. He feels deeply. Our human sin.

Our inhumanity. Our godlessness. Our rejection of himself. The response is.

[35 : 11] The fierceness. Of his anger. God is so upset by it. And he feels keenly.

Our human pain. He looks out tonight. On this world. With all its sadness. Its violence.

Its cruelty. Its poverty. Its great AIDS. Pandemic. All the horrors.

All the horrors of war. And all the horrors. Of homelessness. And all the horrors. Of murdered children. Unabused children. All these horrors.

And all the evils. Of those. Great refugee camps. And those. Appalling concentration camps. And God sees. And God feels.

[36 : 05] And God is the greatest. Sufferer of the universe. I don't want you to take that.

As prosaic. Literal truth. But I want you to know this. From the Bible itself. He beheld a city.

And he wept. Over it. Sometimes. As we watch television.
 We find the news. Unendurable. So deeply disturbing. Those terrible soap operas.
 With their constant. Recycling. Of human misery. And degradation. Aren't they. Unendurable.
 [37 : 12] My heart is stirred. Within me. All the pain. In the world. God saves. And all that affliction.
 I am afflicted. These. He says. Are my creatures. That's my creation. Oh my poor.
 Poor creation. My heart. Is stirred. Within me. My compassions. Are kindled together. God says.
 He feels. Our sin. And he feels. Our pain. And when it comes. To the day of judgment. He will feel it
 too.
 When that terrible moment. Comes. When in the solemn exercise. Of his office as judge. And in the
 pursuit.
 [38 : 15] Of justice. Of justice. And equity. God says. Depart from me. He cursed. In that moment.
 When God says. Take him down. He has no pleasure.
 In the death. Of the wicked. Judgment. Is a strange work. Alien to God.
 God. Our sin. Has put our heavenly father. In the position. Where he has to say.
 Take him down. Take him down. To hell. Down into the darkness. Into that. Place of outer
 darkness.
 [39 : 17] In the darkness. And that is. For our sin. To put God. In a terrible position. Our sin. Has
 put him there.
 When God. Has to do. That which gives him. No pleasure. And he will do it. Not because it gives
 him.
 Pleasure. But because it is right. Because you chose. To live a sinner. And you chose. To die. A
 sinner. And you have put.
 God. In a position. Where he must do. What gives him. No pleasure. And he must do. What he
 recoils. From. And he will say.
 You will hear those words. Going down to hell. How can I give you over. My heart. Is stood within
 me. My repentance. My compassion.
 [40 : 14] Are kindled together. And I think too. Of this God. As he looked at the cross of Calvary.
 And the suffering and pain.
 And death. Of his own son. And I say to you. That he found it so hard.
 To chastise Israel. As he eventually had to. How. How. How. How did he find it.
 When he said. Awake. Oh sword. Against my shepherd. And against the man. That is my fellow.
 When he had to take. The knife. Like Abraham. To his only son. To his only son. Whom he loved.
 [41 : 17] When he had to bruise. Our saviour. He has put him to grief. Our sin.
 Brought that on God. Either he died. Or we die. And I think there is grief in it.
 Grief. And commotion. In the heart of God. God. And what love.
 Must have been there. When all the angels. Stood. On the balconies of heaven. And screamed.
 At God. Don't do it. Don't do it. Don't do it. And yet. He did it.
 [42 : 21] God. His son. Not sparing. Gave him to die. I scarce can take it in. I want to close.
 By saying just two things. Briefly. One is. Don't be afraid. To feel deeply.
 Don't be afraid. Of emotion. Some of you are hurting. Some of you are sore. Some of you are
 wounded.
 Some of you are sorrowing. Some of you. At the end of your tether. Some of you are full of joy.
 Some of you have known.
 Perhaps. The revivals in this party. Some of you have known. Moments of almost heavenly ecstasy.
 Moments. When you knew deep emotion.
 [43 : 22] And felt free to express it. We're not stormy. God didn't mean us to be stormy.
 Let's feel deeply. There is much talk today. Of. How to evangelize.
 And how to witness. And how to this. And how to that. We're very much into the age. Of
 technologies. Even spiritual technologies. What we need.
 Is not technology. But passion. What I need. What I need desperately. Is to feel deeply. I have used
 often.
 A quotation. In which. The poet Wordsworth. Defined poetry. As the spontaneous overflow. Of
 powerful feelings.

[44 : 25] The spontaneous overflow. Of powerful feelings. Christian witness. Is the spontaneous overflow.

Of powerful feelings. The feeling of joy. The feeling of thankfulness. To the God who loved us. That's what we need.

Powerful feeling. Overflowing. In Christian testimony. I've told the story. Of the.

Lewisman. In Glasgow. Converted. And. Instantly. Beginning to preach. In the open air. And. Doing so. In the broken. English. And garlic. Of Laxdale.

Disgracing. In the open air. Disgracing all his Christian friends. And they took him aside. And they said. John. Do you need to. You don't need to stand.

[45 : 21] On that box. There's open air. Preacher. Maybe he didn't. But whatever he lacked. In terms of academic excellence.

Or posh accent. He had grasped one fundamental principle. He said to these men. Who wanted him to desist. He said to them. He saved me. And he'll never hear the end of it.

Ch'ar na mees schatvo hinga yed. Ch'ar na mees schatvo hinga yed. That's the spontaneous overflow. Of powerful feelings. And if we had them tonight.

Every one of us. Would have had with us in church. An unconverted friend. Because of that spontaneous overflow. The powerful feelings.

And my last point is this. This God who is feeling. We can cause. Intense emotion in heaven tonight.

[46 : 30] Those of us who are healed. There is joy in heaven. Over one sinner who repents. And you can be that sinner.

And I tell you. That if you. Bow tonight. At the feet of Christ. And cast your cares upon him.

And ask him to bear your sin. And to act for you. At the great. Throne of judgment. I can tell you.

There will be rejoicing. In the presence of the angels. And there will be ecstasy. In the heart of God. There will be such joy.

Such a thrill. Right through heaven. Or it may be that. All the phones will be busing in point as well. And beyond point as they say.

[47 : 34] Oh so and so has been converted. Let that be as it is. And maybe you'll feel some embarrassment. Go to the meeting next. Next week to the midweek meeting. You'll feel some embarrassment in that.

But I tell you. The great thing is. They're going to be so absolutely thrilled in heaven. God the Father. God the Son. God the Holy Spirit.

And all those angels. And this congregation too. There's nothing brings life and joy to them. Like a new convert.

Oh and a lamb. A lamb. That's what they want. They want lambs. And there'll be joy here. Joy among the angels. Joy in heaven. It's an amazing thing.

The power that you have. The power. To cause joy in heaven. May God bless this world to us.

[48 : 33] Let's join the prayer. Oh Lord we ask you to. Use your word in your own service.

And for your glory. Enable us to see more clearly. The beauty of our Savior. And draw us oh Lord through that vision.

To love him more dearly. And to follow him more nearly. Amen. Prepare us for the Lord's day. And bless us as we gather. And be with all who need your comfort.

And your strength. May this night. For our Savior's sake. Amen.