

"Press on to Know the Lord"

Hosea 6-7

Let's recap where we are in the book of Hosea. Hosea, a prophet of God whose name means 'salvation', is called by God to deliver His message of warning mostly to the Northern 10 tribes (but he wants the two southern tribes to pay attention also), who Hosea is confronting them with spiritually adultery. What is spiritual adultery? Israel themselves were not fully abandoning God but worshipping God and Baal. Presenting their offerings at the Temple one day and then going to the temple of Baal and worshipping him also, which for some would have involved physical immorality.

Worshipping Baal supposedly improved your crops because he controlled the weather. Better crops means more income. More income means more comfortable life for yourself. A form of prosperity theology. Meanwhile, Yahweh the true God, who made a covenant with Israel, miraculously rescuing them from Egypt, miraculously providing for their needs in the desert, miraculously bringing them into the promised land, miraculously defeating their enemies ... promised them in Deut. 28 if you obey Me I will send the rains at the right time so your needs will be met. Walk with Me. Trust Me. Be loyal to Me because I am loyal to you. And God's loyalty was sealed by a covenant made with Abraham, renewed through Moses, David and again through Jeremiah.

But the Baal worshippers around them seemed to be more alluring, promising better success. 'I mean, don't those pagans look like they are enjoying life and seem better off than us? I know what God says but it looks like this is better. Why don't we try both. We're still worshipping God – that will make Him happy – and we'll cover our bases by checking out Baal worship. Seems harmless enough. Those people look happy.'

God emphasized his commitment to Israel with a very vivid word picture. Hosea is called to marry a prostitute and remain committed to her even though she won't be committed to him. She will look for other lovers. She will break his heart. One of her 3 children we think, isn't even Hosea's. Yet Hosea buys her back from the slave market where Gomer landed because – surprise, surprise – the joy and happiness she thought adultery would give her would prove false. And so God warns His people, don't abandon Me for other so-called gods. They are not real. They can't promise you true happiness. Only a committed relationship with Me will give you what you want and I'll look after your needs. Trust Me. I know its not always easy.

The key to their demise is the lack of knowledge of the Word of God. Ch.4 :1

Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land

4:6 my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.

5:1 "Hear this, you priests! Pay attention, you Israelites! Listen, O royal house! This judgment is against you:

And even though God says I will discipline you through exile, He reminds them of His commitment to them and His covenant promise to restore and bless and Ch. 5 ends on this note:

14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them.

¹⁵ *Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me."*

And so the overriding message of Hosea is God loves us and is committed to us so much, that He refuses to leave us in our sin, He constantly pursues us so we will walk with Him everyday. At the beginning of Ch.6 we see this through the pleading words of Hosea to his fellow Israelites,

6:1 *"Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.*

² *After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.*

³ *Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."*

The call to return to the Lord is a reminder for all God's people that

We Always Need to Be Growing in the Lord **(6:1-3)**

Hosea acknowledges God's chastening hand has already been at work. Assyria is closing in on the Northern Kingdom. After Jeroboam's lengthy reign of 30 years, there followed six kings in the last 30 years leading to Assyria's capture. That's a very unsettling political landscape. And since the kings were supposed to listen to God, which they weren't, there was no one other than the prophets pointing out Israel's real problem – sinful rebellion against the Word of God. And that's why we always need to be growing in the Lord. Checking for sinful actions and attitudes and

Repenting from sin and returning to God (vv.1-2)

"Come let us return to the Lord". 'Return' literally means turn around back to where you came from. The northern tribes made two places of centralized worship, both of which had golden calves to apparently represent God. Without the temple and the proper priests/Levites teaching them what God said, they were coming up with their own ideas of worshipping God. Not working very well, Hosea pointed out. The reason why your life is a mess is because God's not the center of your life. He's chastening you to help you return to Him. "Return to me" declares the Lord Almighty, 'and I will return to You' says the Lord almighty' [Zech. 1:3]. It's always a good thing to examine our hearts and see if there is any wicked way in us, confessing our sins and renewing our commitment with God.

"He has torn us to pieces" is in agreement with what God said He would do in 5:14. This is what confession is: agreeing with God about our sin so we can return to Him. V.2 acknowledges that God will heal them in 2 days and restore them on the 3rd day or as some translations say 'raise us up'. The immediate context is a resurrection of the nation of Israel, which will need to happen when Israel is taken away to exile. Even then there is no national turning to God for the nation. That is still in the future as Ezekiel 37 predicts and Zechariah 12-13 as well. Paul affirms this national repentance in Rom. 11:25 when he says, "*All Israel will be saved*" when

"The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. ²⁷ And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.

The covenant promises God made to Israel are binding. He will restore a surviving remnant one day at Christ's return and those who survive the 70th week of Daniel will realize they did not

recognize who Jesus was the first time but this time they will turn to Him.

Speaking of Jesus, we are tempted to think v.2 is a reference to His resurrection, on the 3rd day. The immediate context is plural, a resurrection/restoration of the people and the two days/three days language is a Hebrew way of saying it will happen in a short period of time. However, spiritually speaking no one's resurrection or return to God happens without the death, burial and resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus. This might be an indirect reference to the resurrection but it is not the immediate context.

The whole reason for repenting of our sin is

So we can know His peace and presence (v.3)

God promised Israel in Deut. 28-29 if they obeyed His Word He would meet their needs by providing rain. If they disobeyed Him He would withhold rain. They have two distinct periods in the year where they get rain, noted here by the phrases "the winter rains and the spring rains". The one helps with planting and initial growth, the latter is key for continued growth resulting in fruit. The evidence of rain was an indication of God's presence. And spiritually speaking when we walk with God, He responds to your cry for needs and help and gives us His peace because we are assured God is with you. So Hosea appeals to the people,

Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."

Israel failed to acknowledge God because they abandoned His Word which gave them the knowledge of God. 'Press on' means to pursue, chase. This word was used earlier in Hosea in 2:7 of Gomer who

She will chase after her lovers but not catch them; she will look for them but not find them.

What are we pursuing, chasing after in life? Where is our time and resources and mind focused on most of the time? The emptiness of the world or God through his Word? If we're not pursuing God earnestly we won't have His peace in our life.

And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. [Heb. 11:6]

Hear the word of the LORD, you Israelites, because the LORD has a charge to bring against you who live in the land: "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land

^{4:6} *my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children.*

When we take our eyes off of God, complacency sets in.

Be Careful to Watch for Complacency **(6:4-7:10)**

At this point God speaks again. Hosea pleads for their repentance and now God speaks and reminds them of their sin. It's a long section referring to specific sins Israel had committed. Why did

they sin? Because they compromised. They were disloyal to the covenant God made with them. They tried keeping it and following Baal.

⁴ *What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.*

⁵ *Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.* ⁶ *For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.*

Here's the thing we need to understand here. It's not that Israel had completely chucked worshipping God. It's that they somehow came to doubt that God and His Word were all sufficient. So they watched their unsaved neighbours. Nice people – like ours – who worshipped Baal. And things seemed to go well for them. So they tried both, maybe for comparison. "Maybe I need to be more educated about how the world thinks and acts", we might tell ourselves. The word God uses in v.6 for "love" is 'hesed' which some versions have 'loyalty'. Hesed refers to the loyal love commitment by God for us, but God also expects covenant loyalty from us. How do we become complacent about our commitment to God?

Our hearts get hard from ignoring the truth (vv.4-6)

'Dew' and 'morning cloud' refer to that which doesn't last long. And it's easy to happen. You rushed to get out the door so Bible reading stops. The kids are too noisy to pray at meals. You're too tired at bedtime to read. You miss church here and there because of sickness, work, holiday, sports ... whatever, and before you know it, God crosses your mind briefly and that's about it. You lose touch with fellow believers. Most of your time is spent with non believers. Complacency slips in and initially you're convicted and chide yourself and say 'Yeah, I got get back to the Word, church, prayer, fellowship. Our spiritual life is like morning dew. Brief appearance, then gone.

It's interesting in v.6 that the Israelites hadn't stopped giving sacrifices, as if that's the only thing God cares about. I'm guessing generally speaking there are Christians who give more regularly to their church than they attend it. As if that's the main thing. See that's how idol worship worked. You gave to make the god not mad at you or keep you safe. And sometimes that idolatrous mentality sneaks into Christianity. 'I better read my Daily Bread, so good things happen to me today.' That's un-believing superstitiousness.

Jesus quoted this verse twice (Matt. 9:13; 12:7), once when the Pharisees didn't like His fraternizing with tax collectors and sinners at Matthew's house and the other time when Jesus healed on the Sabbath. It's easy to replace religiosity for a relationship with God, thinking the mere activity is all that God requires. When we get complacent

The downward spiral of sin ensues (6:7-7:7)

Listen to this litany of sins recorded from 6:7 to 7:7;

⁷ *But at Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.*

⁸ *Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood.*

⁹ *As robbers lie in wait for someone, ... murder ... they commit a monstrous crime.*

¹⁰ *In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's whoredom is there, Israel is defiled.*

⁷ *1... the wicked deeds of Samaria; for they deal falsely, the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid outside.*

⁴ *They are all adulterers;*

⁵ *the officials became sick with the heat of wine;*

⁶ ... all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.

⁷ All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers.

All their kings have fallen; none of them calls upon me.

I'm sure none of these people set out to deal faithlessly with God, become evildoers of whoredom, murder, thieves, adulterers and drunkards. They just slid into sin by taking their faith for granted and treating God as if He was a good luck charm at best. And they forgot or ignored the truth of v.2

² But they do not consider that I remember all their wickedness.

Now their deeds surround them, they are before my face.

Strangely enough here's why they were sinning:

They were looking elsewhere for peace and security (vv.8-11)

^{7:8} Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples; Ephraim is a cake not turned. ⁹ Foreigners devour his strength, but he does not know it; gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, but he does not know it. ¹⁰

Israel's pride testifies against him; yet they do not return to the LORD their God, or seek him, for all this. ¹¹

Ephraim has become like a dove, silly and without sense; they call upon Egypt, they go to Assyria.

The word for "mix" is a baking term. Once you mix the ingredients for baking, they each lose their distinctiveness. By making treaties with Egypt to avoid Assyria, and then later with Assyria to avoid punishment, they were opening themselves up to inter-marriages and immoral practices. And they were oblivious to their compromising like one who gradually loses their strength of gets grey hair or forgets to turn over the bread when baking. Only God will give you peace and security that gives you contentment now and shalom forever.

And in the last few verses Hosea repeats God's warning of exile. Another reminder that sin has consequences. We want to always be growing in the Lord so we are on our guard against complacency

So We Avoid the Discipline of God **(7:12-16)**

The chapter ends with more warnings from God who will discipline the Northern Kingdom with exile if they don't repent. Why does God do this?

Because God is committed to us (vv.12-13)

V. 13 says Israel strayed from God, rebelled against God and spoke lies against God, yet "I would redeem them." This is the message of Hosea; God wants His people back. Why? Because He's committed to us. He made a covenant. He doesn't go back on His Word. Discipline has a redemptive and restorative purpose. I love you. Come back. I'd rather not discipline you but I will because I won't abandon you.

God always wants us to turn or return to Him (vv.14-16)

If you flip vv.16-18 into what God wants we would read, *'I want you to cry to me from your heart ... I don't want you to rebel against Me ... I want to strengthen you some more ...*

Turn to Me because I can give you true prosperity.'

Not stuff, but joy in an unhindered relationship with God.

Once more we hear God's Word. How do we respond? Many of you love the Lord, are growing in Him and are just thankful to God for saving you by grace and just want to keep walking in that direction. Amen! Some of you might have complacent tendencies and know you need to smarten up. And a few might realize, hey, I know I'm not where I should be and need to return to God. And maybe someone here doesn't know God because you never realized how much God loves you and sent Jesus to die for the sins that you continue to commit. And it's not leading you in a good place. Let's go to the communion table and help get us on track with God.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please
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