

Marriage Blessing: Hosea 14v1-9

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel, he will blossom like a lily, like a cedar of Lebanon, he will send down his roots. His young shoots will grow, his splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.

Men will dwell again in his shade, he will flourish like the corn, he will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon.

O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols? I will ask him and care for him, I am like a green pine tree, your fruitfulness comes from me.

Who is wise? He will realize these things. Who is discerning? He will understand them. The ways of the Lord are right, the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

Thanks very much, Louise.

[1 : 18] Well, chapter 14 in some ways is like a summary, it's a conclusion, a wrap-up of the whole message of Hosea. So as we come to God's Word, let's pray.

Let's ask that the Lord would help us, not only to understand with our minds, but that we would feel within our hearts, and that God would change us through his Word today.

So let's pray for that. Father, thank you for this message of Hosea. A message that speaks to us today.

And Father, our prayer is that you would not only enable us to understand with our heads intellectually, but that we would sense it, feel it, experience your work deep within our hearts, so that we are changed, we are transformed, and that we become the people that you call us to be.

Father, do your work amongst us today. And for your glory we pray this, and for our good, in Jesus' name.

[2 : 44] Amen. Together, they stood at the front of the church.

It wasn't their first time. Almost five years ago to the day, they had stood in exactly the same place, promising to love each other until death do part.

Friends and family had all gathered together to join in their special day, no expense was spared, the finest of food, the luxurious surroundings, but their marriage celebration was short-lived.

Within a few weeks, she had had an affair with a colleague at work and had walked out of the marriage. But today was a new day, a fresh start.

In love, he had reached out to his unfaithful wife and proposed to her again. And there they stood in the front of the church, ready to renew their vows.

[3 : 59] But that's what we have in chapter 14. Here God is reaching out to his unfaithful people, calling them to himself.

Renew your marriage vows with me. Look at verse 4. God promises, I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.

You remember that Hosea has been a story about God's marriage to his people. God's people had been an adulterous wife.

They had chased after other lovers, replacing God with other things and other people. And God couldn't ignore their behaviour. He was jealous for his people.

He loved them. And he couldn't let them carry on the way they were. So God had promised to bring his judgment upon them. The threat of the Assyrian nation would come upon them.

[5 : 08] But God was not about to give up on his people either. He pursued them. In love, God reached out to them and gives them that opportunity to come to him afresh to renew those marriage vows.

And that is what God is offering to us today. Because in a sense, we are no different. We are the adulterous people. We've rejected his unfaithful love.

We've resisted his kind and generous rule. We've provoked God's anger. And he has promised to come in terrible judgment. But like a broken-hearted husband who refuses to give up on his adulterous wife, so God has passionately pursued us.

In love, God reaches out to us today and gives us that opportunity to renew our marriage vows. So today, this moment, imagine yourself standing at the front of the church.

As it were, if you were renewing those vows, a new beginning. Maybe you've never experienced a relationship with God. You've never known that intimacy with God as father and a faithful, loyal husband.

[6 : 35] Well, today, you can. Or perhaps your relationship with God has just grown cold. You've lost that sense of intimacy.

It's a closed relationship and you no longer experience his love. Well, today, you can.

Because chapter 14 gives us that opportunity to come and meet with God and renew those marriage vows. So what will this marriage blessing look like?

Well, let's look at it in two ways. First, it's a call to return to our true love. Look at verse 1.

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Verse 2. Take words with you and return to the Lord.

[7 : 37] This calling of return is a call to daily repentance. I'm sure as you've been to weddings, you'll hear these vows.

The husband is asked this question. Will you love her? Comfort her? Honor and keep her in sickness and in health?

And forsaking all others, keep yourself only for her. Forsake all others, keep yourself only for her as long as you both shall live.

Well, that's what God is seeking as he's calling his people to return to him. Forsake all other loves and keep yourself only for him.

Now, before we look at how we do that, this returning, this repenting, we need to identify what those other loves are that we have.

[8 : 45] And to help us to identify, I'm going to ask us all just two very simple questions. So I want us to think through what is your answer to these questions. Here's the first one.

What do I turn to for my comfort and pleasure? In life, what do I turn to for my comfort and pleasure?

Maybe it's work. Maybe it's shopping. Maybe it's porn. Maybe it's some substance abuse.

What do you turn to for your comfort and pleasure? Here's the second question. What do I look to for my joy and happiness? Or sorry, who do I look to for my joy and happiness?

Who are the people that I treasure most that I want for my joy and happiness? Well, whatever your answer to those questions, these can become our substitute loves.

[9 : 58] We replace God with these other loves. and our calling today is to return to our one true love. Here's how we do that in three steps.

Here's the first one. Take responsibility for my sin. Look at verse one again. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God.

your sins have been your downfall. The reason that Israel had run away from God was not because God had failed them.

It was because they had eyes for other lovers. God had been faithful and loyal and generous and trustworthy and kind. So the only reason why they turned from God, well, it was because of their own sinful hearts.

And that's what we do. We look away from the source of our true love. We have eyes for other loves and put our hope in other things. And that's not God's fault or anybody else's fault.

[11 : 10] We can't point the finger at somebody else. It's my fault. It's not my upbringing. It's not where I live or what's happened.

If we turn away from God, if we look to other things, it's our own fault. It's my responsibility. And I must learn to take ownership of my sin.

Look what it says at the end of verse one. Your sins have been your downfall. So the first step in returning to our true love is to take responsibility for my sin.

The second is this. Seek forgiveness for my sin. Look at verse two. Take words with you and return to the Lord.

Say to him, forgive all our sins and receive us and receive us graciously. God isn't asking his people to do anything.

[12 : 17] He's not asking them to prove their love or to pass a test. No, it's a simple call to come with words from the heart seeking forgiveness.

forgiveness. This is how our relationship with God starts and it's how our relationship with God continues. It's so simple. Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously.

You see, there is nothing too bad or so terrible that God cannot forgive. Maybe you're sitting there and thinking that if you only knew what was going on in my life or the things I've done or what's going on in my life right now, there's no way God could forgive me.

Well, hear this invitation from our true love to experience forgiveness. Say to him, forgive all my sin and receive me graciously.

In fact, the words of repentance are like our sacrifice. It's like an offering. Look at the end of verse 2. Receive us graciously that we may offer the fruit of our lips.

[13 : 37] The fruit of our lips, the words that we speak to God. This is our offering. This is our sacrifice to God. King David understood this when he sought forgiveness for his adultery.

Psalms 51 records for us as he comes to God. This is what he says. You do not delight in sacrifice or I would bring it. You don't take pleasure in burnt offerings.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

So God is not looking for your track record today. He's not looking at the list of all the things you've done to prove your love. He's simply looking for a broken and contrite heart.

The invitation to us all today is come with these words. Forgive all my sin and receive us graciously.

[14 : 49] So, as we return to the Lord, take responsibility for my sin, seek forgiveness for my sin, and third, renew trust in my Saviour.

Look at verse 3. Assyria cannot save us. We will not mount war horses. We will never again say, Our gods, to what our own hands have made.

You see, God's people in their spiritual adultery, as they look to other loves, they look to other nations, like Assyria, to their own military power.

this was going to be their Saviour. They replaced God with other nations and with horses and with their armies. We don't need God.

We can live life without Him, they said. We can get our safety and our security from other things. And we're no different. We substitute God with our work, our money, our material possessions and think, Well, if I can have that, then I will be okay.

[16 : 01] We replace God with our children, our spouse, our loved ones and we think, If I can have this or if I can have that in my life, then I will be secure.

Then I will be satisfied. Everything will be alright. But the gods of our making can never save you. Israel would discover that.

Assyria wouldn't save them, they would destroy them. And that's what will happen to us. The gods that we make, the middle of verse 3, that we have made with our own hands, our own thinking, they will just demand more of you, they will break you.

But our saving God, He is the God who comes to give to you. Look at the end of verse 3. For in you, in God, the fatherless find compassion.

To run from God is to become fatherless. To run away, to turn away from God is to be without hope, without a saviour.

[17 : 13] But to return to God, to renew our trust in Him, we find our true saviour. We find a God who gives His life for us. A God who will die for you.

A saviour who will never fail you or trick you or disown you. This is what it means to return to the Lord your God.

It's this daily discipline of repentance. Of taking responsibility for my sin. Seeking forgiveness for my sin.

And renewing trust in my saviour. As we come to our God to renew those vows, it starts with our returning to Him.

The second thing that we need to see as we come to renew our vows is that we can have our relationship with Him restored, restored with our true love.

[18 : 22] And as we return to our true love, God promises us three things. I want us to grasp these three promises that God brings to our life as we return to Him.

Here's the first one. Healing from our past. Look at verse 4. Here's God speaking to His people as we return to Him.

First He says, I will heal their waywardness and love them freely for my anger has turned away from them.

You know, one of the reasons why we don't turn back to God is because of fear. We fear that if we come back to God, He's going to punish me for my past.

He's going to have a list of all the things I've done wrong and He's going to punish me. But look what it says. Look at the end of verse 4. He says, My anger has turned away from them.

[19 : 30] Of course, Hosea was speaking of something much greater that was to come. An experience that we can have for ourselves as we trust in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

You see, the punishment that we deserve for turning away from God is now turned away from us and turned onto the Lord Jesus Christ.

God's wrath for my sin has turned away from me and has now fallen upon the Lord Jesus. So when we come to Him with our past, when we come to Him with our lives, we no longer have to fear coming to Him because He has dealt with our sin.

He has dealt with it in Jesus. In fact, He says to us beginning of verse 4, I will heal their waywardness. I will heal all their turning away and I will love them freely.

So hear this promise to us today. in Jesus, in Jesus, your past has been dealt with. The barrier of sin is completely removed.

[20 : 50] There is now no condemnation. You can come freely to God and enjoy the love of God because He has healed your past.

but it gets even better than that. Here is the second promise. A flourishing relationship.

Look at verse 5. God says, I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like a lily. Verse 7, men will dwell again in His shade.

He will flourish like the corn. He will blossom like a vine. The picture is clear here. It is a picture of a parched dry land.

It is barren. Nothing grows. But then verse 5, the morning dew comes that drenches and soaks that dry land and gives the plants its vital moisture and everything that is necessary for it to begin to blossom and flourish.

[21 : 59] And so as the dew falls, the lilies, the corn, the vines, it all begins to blossom. It begins to fulfil its purpose. And that's the picture for us.

As we return to the Lord, as we trust in our true Saviour, as we turn away from our false loves on a daily basis, so we begin to experience His grace.

His grace falls upon us like the morning dew. It drenches our lives, it soaks our lives so that we begin to flourish. We become the people that God calls us to be.

In fact, we will grow strong and mature. Look at the rest of verse 5. We will become like a cedar of Lebanon. He will send down His roots, His young shoots will grow, His splendour will be like an olive tree, His fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.

The cedars of Lebanon are known for their strength and durability, their strong roots enabling them to stand strong and to grow.

[23 : 16] Well, here's this amazing promise. As we return to our true love, as we put down our deep roots, as we invest time with God in our relationship with Him, listening to His words, speaking to Him in prayer, joining together with one another as we're doing now, so we become strong and healthy in our marriage with God.

We will have roots that will hold us fast, so that when the trials test us, when the temptations begin to lure us away, when the troubles come and they bring doubt to our lives, we will not move and we will be strong and mature.

Our relationship with God will flourish and blossom. So not only do we have healing from our past, not only is our life going to flourish, but look at this third promise, there will be fruitfulness in our life.

Look at verse 8. O Ephraim, which was another name for God's people, what more have I to do with idols, or what more has Ephraim got to do with idols?

Our idols, the gods that we make, are false, they're made up, they give us nothing, they leave us empty, they leave us dry, they don't satisfy. But God says, verse 8, I will answer him and care for him.

[24 : 58] I am like a green pine tree, your fruitfulness comes from me. Instead of looking to our false gods, our idols, we are to look to the true source of our love, who is God.

And God promises us a fruitful life, just as the pine tree is the source of its fruit, it brings about the cones on the tree, so God is the source for a fruitful life for us.

Look back at verse 5, the end of verse 5, it says, like the cedar of Lebanon, he will send down his roots and his young shoots will grow.

if we send down those roots deep into the source who is God, so we will become fruitful. The imagery is not unlike what Jesus spoke to his own disciples in John chapter 15.

Keep your finger in Hosea and jump to John chapter 15. John chapter 15 and verse 5.

[26 : 29] So we're thinking here of roots, we're thinking of being tied in to the Lord, and from that comes a flourishing relationship and a fruitful life.

So, as Jesus speaks, chapter 15 verse 5, he says, I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man or woman remains in me and I in him, you will bear much fruit.

Apart from me, you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, they are like a branch that is thrown away and withers.

Such branches are picked up and thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

God, give me a new car or provide for me a new house or give me better health.

[27 : 45] That's not the kind of fruit that is being promised or talked about here. It's the fruit that comes from a relationship with God that's nurtured and nourished.

look at the beginning of verse 7. It says, if you remain in me and my words remain in you, so this is about remaining in and abiding in his word.

That is the nourishment and the source for fruitfulness. And the kind of fruit that we can expect, well, freedom from guilt and shame, grace when we feel weak and low, joy in times of struggle and suffering, assurance when we are afraid and in doubt, peace in times of trouble and trials, comfort when we lose a loved one, hope when facing death, eternal life when Christ comes again.

Verse 8, this is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

This is the fruit that is promised when we return to the source of all life as we put down our roots deep down into God's word and soak up that nourishment.

[29 : 17] So we produce a fruitful life, freedom and grace and joy and assurance and peace and comfort and hope. That is the promise that God gives to you today.

we'll turn back to Hosea. As we've seen throughout the book of Hosea, we have all broken our marriage vows with God.

And the problem is we all do it on a daily basis. well today, this moment, as we sit and hear God's word, it provides us with a fresh start, a new beginning, right now.

Look at verse 9. Who is wise? He will realise these things. Who is discerning?

they will understand them. The wise and discerning person not only hears God's offer and these promises, but they put God's word into practice.

[30 : 41] James reminds us in the New Testament, do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. If we are to experience a fresh start with God, if we are going to enjoy the intimacy with him afresh, if we are going to know these promises in our life, then we must apply chapter 14 to our life.

We have got to put it into practice. Look at the rest of verse 9. The ways of the Lord are right. The righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

Here's the call to walk in the ways of the Lord. What's that going to look like for you and for me? Tomorrow morning, tonight, during the week, what's it going to look like to walk in the ways of the Lord?

Well, it's to simply do what chapter 14 is telling us to do. When we fail and fall, rather than run from the Lord in fear, we are to return to the Lord.

Return to him with words, verse 2, forgive all my sin and receive us graciously. Come with that absolute confidence and assurance that Jesus took upon himself all our acts of spiritual adultery and paid for the penalty on the cross and has now covered us in his purity so that we can be welcomed in forever.

[32 : 27] He heals our waywardness, loves us freely, for my anger has turned away from you. Renew your trust in the one true Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Receive these rich promises. Live in the knowledge that your past has been healed. Enjoy a flourishing relationship with God.

Experience fruitfulness in your life. Let's pray for God to do that work in our life today, right now.

Let's pray. Amen.

Heaven. He is wise,