'Insincere Repentance'

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] Well, thanks to a former vicar here, Paul Barker. Some of you will have heard that I was made an archdeacon last Wednesday.! Archdeacon is, I'm still working it out actually, but it's kind of just one below the bishop, which helps the bishop out with things.

But it really just means more work for me. And it comes with some pomp and ceremony, which if you know me, I really am not a fan of.
And so I was really hoping for a low key commissioning in the archbishop's office with just him and me or perhaps nothing at all. But instead they decided to do it in the city at the cathedral during the opening service of synod in front of some 400 people.
And so here's the archbishop and me wishing I was off the stage. Someone remarked that it must have been so special for me. Not many archdeacons have this privilege of being commissioned in front of all these people.
And I responded with, yes, so special. I'm not sure they picked up my tone, but I must confess I was a little insincere. And the point is we can be insincere over all sorts of things, can't we?
[1:21] We can have insincere humility. Like the person who confessed, I'm not always right, but when I am, it's usually all the time. Or we can be insincere when it comes to an apology.

I'm sorry for that mean, awful, completely accurate thing I said. Or we can be insincere when it comes to compliments. Your idea is so good because it highlights how mine is much better.
And when it comes to God and our sin, we can also have insincere repentance, which brings us to our passage. Let me just remind you of what we saw last week, though, to help you make sense of this week.
Last week, we saw God's restorative justice. Yeah, he needed to bring justice for their sin because it was serious and stubborn. But it had a goal of restoring them.
And we saw that particularly at the end of chapter 5 last week, where God says he will be like a lion to Ephraim, a great lion to Judah. He will tear them to pieces. But, verse 15, that will only happen until they have borne their guilt and seek my face.
[2:30] In their misery, they will earnestly seek me. Now, just to remind you, Ephraim and Judah there, just so you know what's being talked about. The kingdom of Israel originally was both the purple and the green combined.

But after King Solomon, it was split in two. And the northern kingdom in green kept the name Israel, sometimes called Ephraim, after the biggest tribe up there.
And where Samaria was as well. So, it kind of gets called different names. Israel, Ephraim, Samaria. That's the north. And in the purple in the south is Judah, after the biggest tribe of Judah down there.
And here, at the end of chapter 5, he's speaking to both Ephraim and Judah. But notice, this judgment was meant to lead them to repentance.
And not just seeking him, end of verse 15, but seeking him earnestly. That is, sincerely. Wholeheartedly. But as we'll see today, any repentance on their part was insincere.
[3:37] At least during the time of Hosea. And yet, as we look at these chapters, it will teach us both about God's character and about our repentance. How it should be sincere.

Starting with how real repentance means restoration. So, point 1 and chapter 6, verse 1. It seems to be Israel speaking. Here is an expression of repentance.
In verse 1, the word return also means repent. And this expression teaches us three things about repentance. Firstly, it really does restore us.
Notice their confidence seen by the repetition of the word will. If they repent or return, the Lord will heal us. He will bind us.

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Put on dressings on our wounds. In other words, forgive us. Even in verse 2, he will revive us and will restore us with the result of living in his presence.
[5:06] That is, in a right relationship with him. And even again in verse 3, he will appear and he will come to us. And just as rain waters and brings life to the earth, so God will come and bring life and restoration to us.

Repentance will lead to restoration. And secondly, it will happen quickly. In verse 2, when it says two days, he will revive us.
On the third day, he will restore us or literally raise us. Perhaps it's pointing to Jesus' resurrection on the third day. But it's really a poetic device that means a short time, quickly.
We might say of healing, or the doctor might say of healing, instead of months, it will be two or three days at the most. In other words, it will be quick. Repentance means quick restoration.
Which also teaches us, by the way, that God wants to forgive us. For God doesn't deliberate, saying, Maybe I should make young Barry Joel down here wait a bit longer, you know, before I forgive him.
[6:12] Even though he's sorry and repented, I might just kind of draw it a bit out. You know, like the health funds do, where you have to have a waiting period, so before you can use your extras cover. God is not like that.

He's ready and waiting to cover us with forgiveness and to restore us the moment we repent. As we often read during a time of confession, this verse from 1 John, If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will make us wait for forgiveness.
No, good. I was just trying to see if anyone was awake out there. No, he will forgive us our sins and purify us from all restoration. No waiting.
Just forgiveness. Real repentance means quick restoration. But the third thing to notice about this repentance here is it also involves a resolve to know God again.
Follow him above all again. For Israel, this meant knowing God as their only God. Remember their sin was, not just they'd worship God, but they'd also add all these other gods and worship all them and follow their practices as well.
[7:24] Kind of like what we do when we kind of worship the true God, but then add other gods like money or family or comfort or health and worship them equally. But the thing is, when you do that, then God is no longer the only God, is he?

You've got all these other ones along with him. And that's what Israel was doing. And so in verse 3, Israel says, let us acknowledge God or literally let us know God, by which they mean as our only God again, following him alone.
And notice the resolve to do this because in verse 3, it's repeated, isn't it? Let us acknowledge the Lord. And again, let us acknowledge the Lord. And in fact, in the second line, they even add these words, let us press on.
There's this idea of determination, resolve, not just to return to God, but to stop that sin and follow him alone again.
You see, repentance involves a resolve to try and stop sinning and follow God again. And so when we repent, do we resolve as well not to sin?
[8:33] For example, when we pray for forgiveness, do we also ask for God's help to stop us sinning again and to follow him alone?

And do we then work harder that, perhaps putting things in place that might also help us to stop that sin? Now, getting rid of temptation, if you like. Now, of course, sinning less and growing more is often a journey, isn't it?
And we often stumble. Hopefully, the journey, you know, is like that. So hopefully, there's an upward trajectory, but, you know, it's often stumbling and things like that. At one level, that's okay. It just means we ought to keep repenting, but also keep resolving to try not to sin, asking for God's help. And so for Israel here, this sounds like a pretty promising start, these three verses, doesn't it?
And yet, there's also something missing. There's no godly sorrow that leads to repentance and brings salvation, as we heard in our second reading. There's no heartfelt confession of sin.
[9:43] Yes, they admit that God has judged them or injured them, but they don't actually admit they've done anything wrong, do they? Which perhaps should alert us that when they did repent, at least during Hosea's time, their repentance was not earnestly, Not sincerely!

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They've gone to the temple with sacrifices to seek God, but they did not go earnestly or sincerely as God wanted, which God now exposes in verse 4, point 2, verse 4.
He goes on to say, what can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears. Can you imagine seeing that on a Valentine's Day card?
Your love is like the morning mist that disappears before morning tea. Of course, you wouldn't see it on a Valentine's card because it's not true love, right? But that's the point.
Israel's love is not true love. It's not wholehearted towards God. Even despite God sending prophet after prophet, verse 5, therefore I cut you to pieces with my prophets, I killed you with the words of my mouth, then my judgments go forth like the sun, for I desire mercy, not sacrifice, an acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings.
[11:01] Because of their insincere love, God sent prophet after prophet to convict them with their words and cause them to repent, but they didn't.

And verse 6 is an example of this insincere love. In fact, the word mercy is literally steadfast love. This is what God really wants from them more than their herds of sacrifices and burnt offerings. He wants their hearts more than their herds. because without their hearts, it's empty religion. It's just going through the motions.
But that's what they were doing. And we can do the same sometimes too, can't we? And what's more, without a heart that sincerely loves God and really wants to follow God, then Israel won't be faithful to God, will they?
And so, in verse 7, it says, as at Adam, they have broken the covenant. They were unfaithful to me there. And that covenant included how to not just treat God, but also treat others.
[12:07] Remember the Ten Commandments? The first four are about how to treat God, but then the other six are all about how to treat others. You know, do not lie or steal or murder and so on. But they broke God's covenant by doing those very things.

like in verse 6, the city of Gilead is full of evildoers and it's like a murder scene which has all these bloody footprints all over it from their murder.
And yet, despite this, God still wants to restore them, heal or forgive them. And so, at the end of chapter 6, beginning of chapter 7, we read, whenever I would restore the fortunes of my people, whenever I would heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed and the crimes of Samaria, northern kingdom, still revealed.
They practice deceit. These break into their houses. He's stealing. Bandits rob in the streets. But they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them.
They are always before me. Here again is God's desire to restore and heal. But whenever he tries, they're too engulfed or engrossed in their sin to hear him.
[13:26] Or even remember that God will be forced to judge them. Verse 2 says, they do not realize or literally, they do not say in their hearts that God remembers their sin.

And by remember, it means not just remember, but then do something about it. Be forced to judge them. But they're so engrossed in sin, they don't hear God's offer to restore them or even say in their hearts, God will be forced to judge them.
Rather, verse 1, it simply exposes and reveals how sinful they really are. It reminds me of trying to get my kids to the dinner table. Whenever I call out to them that dinner is ready, they're so engrossed in their screens, they don't hear me or say in their hearts, I'll get in trouble if I don't go.
I mean, the only one who listens to me, of course, is the dog. Yeah? My wife, Michelle too, of course. But the fact that the kids don't even hear my call to feed them or say in their hearts that they'll get in trouble if they don't go simply exposes how engrossed in their screens they really are.
Or so too, hear. Israel's failure to even hear God's call to restore or say in their hearts that they'll be judged if they don't repent and go back to him exposes just how engulfed or engrossed in their sin they really are.
[14:57] And sadly, I've seen this with people in the world. You know, I've had a conversation and asked someone, have you ever thought about God or Jesus? Oh no, I'm too busy to think about all those things.

I'm too engrossed in living my life my way to even think or hear about God's offer of salvation. And this is especially true for the leaders and kings of Israel who are happy to use the people's wickedness to advance their own political aspirations.

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In fact, these leaders are like ovens that need no stirring or stoking because their hearts are constantly burning with evil plans and backstabbing.
And that's what God goes on to talk about in verses 3 to 7. It says, they delight the king with their wickedness and the princes with their lies. They are all adulterers burning like an oven whose fire the baker need not stir from the kneading of the dough till it rises.
On the day of the festival of our king, the princes become inflamed with wine and they join hands with mockers. Here's the intrigue and conspiracy. Their hearts are like an oven. They approach him with intrigue.
[16:09] Their passion smoulders all night and in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are as hot as an oven and they devour their rulers or their kings for and none of them falls on me.

And this happened even during Hosea's time when Jeroboam II died ending a period of stability and wealth in the north in Israel. His son Zechariah became king and he reigned for how long?
A whole six months before he was assassinated. He was assassinated by Shalem who then became king and Shalem reigned for a whole one month.
That's how long and he was assassinated this time by Menahem. Menahem was the one who then started paying huge amounts of money to Assyria to let him rule instead of looking to God.
All this is verse 7. All their kings fall and none of them falls on God for help. They go to the nations instead. And while their leaders are like ovens constantly burning with intrigue and assassination, the nation itself is half-baked bread towards God.
[17:16] Verse 8. Ephraim or Israel mixes with the nations. Ephraim is a flat loaf not turned over. A loaf not turned over in those ovens is like half-baked bread.

It's baked on just one side. And that's because they were half-hearted or insincere towards God. So since they followed the gods of the nations too, then when it came to the true God, their hearts weren't really in it.
Like we saw before, they were just going through the motions. They offered sacrifices to the true God on Sunday and then worshipped the other gods of the nations on Monday like we can do.
And so they don't realise that their time is running out. In fact, they arrogantly think they're fine.
Verse 9 and 10. Foreigners sap his, that is Israel's strength, but he does not realise it. His hair is sprinkled with grey, but he does not notice.
Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this, he does not return, repent to the Lord, his God, or search for him. In verse 9, foreigners like Assyria sap their strength, like the wealth that King Menahem gave them.
[18:31] And they don't realise this. They still think they're like a young man with strength, when actually, they're like an older man with sprinkled grey hair who's closer to the end of their life, which I know is a bit depressing for us, but for the record, my hair is sprinkled with greys as well.

It's just that the blondes cover it up a bit. And the reality simply is that I'm getting closer to the end of my life too. Of course, I arrogantly think that I'm still young and strong with plenty of time.
Oh, in fact, I was at the gym recently and I saw some young guy pick up these weights and kind of just lift them up and so I thought, I can do that as well. And so I had a go and it turned out that I could not do that.
And now I'm still paying for it. Well, Israel arrogantly thinks it's young and strong with plenty of time when actually their strength has been sapped, their hair is sprinkled and they're closer to the end of their life as a nation because God's judgment is coming just as Hosea has been warning them.
And yet they still refuse to return or repent, which tells us again that any repentance back in the beginning of chapter six was insincere. In other words, all their actions here expose their insincerity.
[19:50] But I wonder if we can sometimes be insincere towards God too. I like being half-baked towards God as I already hinted at. We can come to church on Sundays to worship God and then we can go back to our lives on Mondays and forget all about God by not praying to Him during the week or reading His Word.

Or we can ignore God and live the world's way Monday to Saturday instead of living God's way. That's being half-baked or half-hearted towards God. Or even when we do come to church on Sundays, we can just go through the motions.
You know, we can take part in communion, we can stand for the singing, but our hearts aren't really in it. You know, we can count the rafters during the sermon or have communion without really

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reflecting or sing begrudgingly such that we sing, how great thou art.
When we're really saying in our hearts, how great thou art. It's easy to fall into that trap of insincerity, isn't it? And the good news is, though, God is always ready and waiting to restore.
He longs to redeem when we return to Him, which makes Israel's refusal senseless. point three, verse 11. Ephraim is like a dove, easily deceived and senseless.
[21:18] Now calling to Egypt, now turning to Assyria. When they go, I will throw my net over them. I will pull them down like the birds in the sky. When I hear them flocking together, I will catch them.

Here, Israel, is described like a dove. And I know when we often think of doves, we think of pure and white, a symbol of peace. But apparently, doves are dumb.
Especially when it comes to food. They get so fixated on food that they're blind or senseless to any danger around them. And so they were easily trapped with a net.
And that's what the Israelites did. They trapped them and used them for food. Which means Israel would have got this analogy. That because they're so fixated on chasing after nations for help, rather than asking God for help, then they're blind or senseless to the danger that judgment is about to come upon them.
And they're also senseless in terms of crying out to false gods, not just other nations, but false gods as well. When the true God is right there. In verse 14, it goes on to say that they do not cry out to me from their hearts, but while on their beds, they slash themselves, appealing to their gods.
[22:33] That's what they would often do. They would treat their bodies harshly. In fact, even in some parts of the Roman Catholic Church, you treat your body harshly to try and earn God's forgiveness. And that's what they were doing there, trying to twist the false god's arm like Baal to answer their prayers when the true God is right there.

In fact, verse 15, God had already trained them and strengthened their arms when they were little. But now they just plot evil against him. And so verse 16, they refused to turn or literally return to him.
It's senseless. Why would you do this when God's already helped you in the past and he's right there waiting to help you again? And what makes this really senseless is that God just doesn't want to help them, but he longs to redeem them.
End of verse 13 that we skipped over. I long to redeem them, he says. But verse 14, they do not cry out to him from their hearts. The point is they don't have to suffer this coming judgment.
But God is right there waiting and longing to redeem them. But they're just too senseless to see it.
And I wonder if we know people like this. People who are too senseless to see God's willingness to redeem, to restore.
[23:54] People who perhaps suffer in life but then cry out to the gods of this world for peace and hope when the Christian God can give both. Or perhaps people who blame God for things that aren't God's fault and refuse to see what God has done for them in Christ.

Or people who look to the gods of this world for satisfaction in life like money and family and possessions and relationships and holidays. None of those things are bad, of course, but they don't bring lasting satisfaction or contentment.
Money goes, possessions break, our holidays end, relationships let us down sometimes. But God remains constant and brings lasting contentment.
And so if we know people who senselessly refuse God's willingness to redeem, then pray for them. Pray that God might help their hearts to see God's longingness and willingness to restore them, to redeem them, save them, and to give them life eternal with Him.
In fact, God longs to redeem so much so that He gave His only Son to die for us and for them. And so for those here today or perhaps online who are not yet restored to a right relationship with God, then why not sincerely repent for the first time believing in Jesus.
[25:22] But when you do, God will quickly redeem you and restore you to a right relationship with Him, with life eternal.

And for us who have already believed in Jesus, then why not sincerely repent for the umpteenth time, confessing our sin and resolving to follow Him with His help because we still sin, don't we?
And so why don't we confess now? We're going to do that by saying this prayer of confession on the screen, which picks up some of the things from our passage, like the thing that Israel didn't do was to confess our sins with sorrow.

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So we are sorry for our sins. And then you've got the resolve, sorry, the turning away, the repenting and turn away from our sins, that's repenting. But you've also got the resolve in the second yellow line, by your Holy Spirit enable us to live for you.
But before we say this, please do take a moment to reflect on your own heart towards God. Perhaps there are ways that you go through the motions here on a Sunday. Or perhaps there are ways that you're half-hearted towards God, worshipping on a Sunday and then forget Him Monday, Tuesday through Saturday.
[26:38] Take a moment just to reflect and do business with God and then we'll say this prayer of confession in a moment. On the screen, let us say together, Heavenly Father, you have loved us with an everlasting love, but we have often gone our own way and rejected your will for our lives.

We are sorry for our sins and turn away from them. For the sake of your Son who died for us, forgive us, cleanse us and change us.
By your Holy Spirit, enable us to live for you and to please you in every way. For the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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