'False Security and Final Warning'

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[0:00] And please turn your Bibles to Hosea chapter 8. Our passage today actually covers Hosea chapters 8 to 10.

! That's three chapters. And if you look at your physical Bibles, it covers more than five columns of text.
So unless you want to stay here until nighttime, I suggest we'll focus primarily on chapter 8, while drawing occasionally from chapters 9 and 10, because they all share the same central themes.
But let's start with a question to get us thinking. What do you think are the signs of a prosperous society? You don't have to answer out loud.
What do you think are the signs of a prosperous society? Well, according to some theories, there are four signs. Strong political power, so strong government and the law.
[1:04] Strong military power. Strong economic power. So strong GDP and functioning economy.
And strong either ideological or religious power.

So in many traditional societies, it's religion. In many modern secular societies, it's a kind of ideology. Now, these four things are important and good.
And yet, these four things can easily become idols if we put our hopes in them. And if we say that if only we have those things, we will be okay.
If only we have strong governments, if only we have enough money, if only we're powerful enough to defend ourselves, if only we are religious or moral enough, we will be okay.
So these things which are good in themselves can become idols if we trust them more than we trust God. And that's what we see in Hosea chapters 8 to 10.
[2:12] Now, previously, we have seen how Israel was supposed to be God's people in a covenant relationship with Him, much like in the marriage, to exclusively trust Him and no other gods and to mirror His good character by following His law.

But here in these chapters, we see Israel trusting in things other than God. We see Israel trusting in those four things that we just mentioned.
And so God is warning them. In verse 1, Put the trumpet to your lips. An eagle is over the house of the Lord because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law.
Sounding a trumpet means giving a warning. Something dangerous is coming or an attack is coming. An eagle or a vulture is hovering over the house of God or the people of God because a vulture knows that when there's a battle, there's death.
And so here is a picture of judgment. God's people will be judged. It's coming. Why? Because the people have broken the covenant and rebelled against the law.
[3:37] The covenant expressed by the law is the basis of the relationship between God and His people. And so by rebelling against that, they rebel against God Himself.

Now how does Israel respond to this accusation? Verse 2, Israel cries out to me, Our God, we acknowledge you or literally, we know you.
We're Israel. Remember, we're your people. We know you. Israel still claims covenant relationship. They call God our God.
And they claim that they know Him. Based on what? Probably like the Jews during Jesus' time, based on inherited knowledge.
Remember during Jesus' time, the Pharisees often say, we're descendants of Abraham. Meaning, because they're descendants of Abraham, they know God. But it doesn't work that way, does it?
[4:43] Knowing God in the Bible is not just about having the right information about Him. It's not just having the right information that you have heard from your parents or grandparents. God doesn't want His people to know about Him.

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He wants them to know Him. Intimately, relationally, like in a marriage. So what's the evidence of Israel's knowledge of God?
They have none. In fact, in the rest of the passage, God outlines the evidence that Israel doesn't know God. In verse 3, God says, but Israel has rejected what is good.
An enemy will pursue Him. Israel has rejected what is good. They have rejected God's good character. because they have rejected His covenant and law.
In fact, the word reject in the Hebrew sounds similar to the word whoredom. And that takes us back to chapter 1. There's a wordplay here that connects the two themes.
[5:58] They have rejected what is good because they have committed spiritual adultery and rejected the good God. God. In fact, they have also rejected God's word through the prophets.

If we jump to chapter 9, God says that His prophet is considered a fool and snares await Him in Israel.
So here's the evidence that they don't know God. They reject God's law, they reject God's covenant, and they don't listen to God's prophets. How can that be reconciled to Israel's claim of knowing God?
That's like me saying, I know Hannah, my wife, relationally, intimately, but I don't read her texts. I don't pick up the phone when she calls.
And when she talks to me, I don't listen and instead I just look at my phone. I don't do that, by the way. We, today, might claim to know God.
[7:15] We go to church, of course, we claim to know God. But do we listen to His word? Do we see His goodness or reject it?

Do we rebel against His word? Now, the evidence continues in verse 4 to 6. They set up kings without my consent.
They choose princes without my approval. With their silver and gold, they make idols for themselves to their own destruction. Samaria, throw out your calf idol.
My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of purity? They are from Israel. This calf, a metal worker has made it. It's not God.
It will be broken in pieces, that calf of Samaria. So, their rejection of God doesn't only manifest in their rejection of the law and the covenant and the prophets, but also in how they rely on things other than God.
[8:22] What are they relying on in these verses? First, they rely on their own political effort or political wisdom. Israel has been establishing rulers for themselves without consulting God.

And even worse, in the northern kingdom of Israel during this time, if you read the stories, the king changes very often because of rebellion after rebellion and assassination after assassination.
So, rather than trusting in God's appointments of his kings, they rely on their own judgment and efforts, mostly evil efforts.
They're not trusting in God. How can they claim knowledge knowledge of God? And second, in verse 5-6, not only that they're trusting their own political effort, they're trusting an idol to give them economic prosperity.
a made-up God that they themselves have made. This calf idol has been made by a craftsman.
[9:42] The people take their prosperity, the silver and gold, and turn it into an idol so that they can worship it in the hope that this idol brings them more prosperity.

It's almost comical, isn't it? It's absurd, and yet, what does it show? It shows again their reliance on themselves. They made the idol.
They can control it and they can ask it to give them what they want. How can they claim knowledge of God?
And isn't that also how modern idolatry works? We might not manufacture golden calves anymore, but we do manufacture plenty of other things with our own efforts which in turn we trust, which we turn into our source of security.
Take money, for example, or Korea. We work hard, we earn money, we save it, we invest it, and we build up our financial security around it. None of that is necessarily wrong in itself.
[10:56] So perennuation is not necessarily wrong in itself. Investment is not necessarily wrong in itself. But if we trust in it more than we trust God, do we truly know God, our provider?

That's what Israel does in this passage. And if we go to chapter 9 again, we can sense God's frustration. When I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert.

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God loves Israel so much. Can you imagine finding grapes in the desert? God loves Israel. He pursues Israel, and yet Israel pursues Baal.
they want the prosperity that Baal promises, which is a false promise. Or in chapter 10, God says that the more fruit Israel has, the more prosperity they have, the more they use for idolatry.
That's tragic, isn't it? you know how we often talk about how difficult it is to cope with suffering? There are countless books and resources designed to help people cope with hardship and suffering.
[12:30] How often do we talk about coping with prosperity? Because prosperity can actually be spiritually dangerous. Israel has proven that for thousands of years.

that's what happens to Israel in this passage. The more they have, the less they trust in God until they kick God out of the picture altogether.
How can they claim intimate knowledge of God? And friends, this should be a serious warning for us Christians because it is possible for us to fall into the same trap.
It is possible for us to think, I'm a Christian, I've been baptized, I go to church, I know the Bible, I take communion, of course I know God. But does doing all those things necessarily mean that we truly know him in an intimate relational sense?
talk about this during the theological forum yesterday. If I were to do the ritual of making coffee for Hannah every morning, would that necessarily mean that I truly love him?
[14:00] I could still do the same ritual every morning and not love her, sorry, not him, love her. In our New Testament reading, Jesus gives us a warning.

He says that not everyone who calls him Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. these people who will say to him, Lord, Lord, to Jesus, claim knowledge of him.
They think they have faith in him and yet Jesus will say to them, I never knew you. I never knew you. There's no personal knowledge.
There's no personal relationship because there's no genuine trust in him. Now, Christians can have gospel assurance.
This is one of God's greatest gifts for us. If we trust in Jesus, we can have the assurance that when Jesus comes, he will take us as his bride to live with him.
[15:02] We don't have to doubt. But that assurance is only for us if we are his bride. If we are his bride. If we have trusting personal relationship with him as in a marriage.

Right? Israel doesn't. So now, from verse 7 onwards, God announces his judgment.
In verse 7, they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head. It will produce no flower. Were it to yield grain, foreigners would swallow it up.
Now, the image of sowing the wind here is important. Imagine a farmer, but instead of sowing seeds, he sows the wind. Nothingness.
What harvest can he expect? Nothing. He sows nothing, so he can expect nothing to reap.
[16:05] But here, he doesn't just harvest nothing. He harvests something destructive, a whirlwind. That's what idolatry does. Israel worships Baal because Baal is associated with fertility and prosperity.

Abundant harvests, but as a judgment, God says that their crops will fail, there will be famine. The idol that they trust will not just disappoint them by giving them nothing, it will give them destruction.
Now, this picture is developed further in chapter 9, where Israel's threshing floors and wine presses will not feed the people. And so, in verse 5, they're appointed festivals will be like funerals, producing bread of mourners in verse 4.
So, they trust in their idols to provide strong economy, abundant harvests, prosperity of the land, but God judges them by destroying their harvests.
but the judgment doesn't stop there. Remember, they also trust in their strong political power and political wisdom, so God destroys that too.
[17:29] In verse 8 to 10, Israel is swallowed up. Now she is among the nations like something no one wants, for they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey, wandering alone.

Ephraim has sold herself to lovers. Although they have sold themselves among the nations, I will now gather them together. They will begin to waste away under the oppression of the mighty king.
So, Israel trusts in their own political wisdom and effort. previously they have set up kings without God's consent, and now they have gone to other nations for political help, rather than going to God for help.

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And so God judges them by letting them be carried to the other nations into oppression. And it continues.
Remember the four signs of a prosperous society? Israel trusts in political power, it's destroyed, Israel trusts in economic power through Baal, it's destroyed.
[18:34] The next one is religion. Verse 11 to 13. Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning.

I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something foreign. Though they offer sacrifices as gifts to me, and though they eat the meat, the Lord is not pleased with them, now he will remember their wickedness and punish their sins, they will return to Egypt.
Throughout the previous chapters, Israel always thinks that they know God because they keep doing the outward religious rituals, like bringing sin offerings and sacrifices.
sacrifices. Now, the sacrificial system was meant to be a good thing. It's God's gift for them to enable them to live with God and enjoy God's forgiveness.
But they turn it into a cold religious ritual that is detached from any relationship with God. They turn it into a transactional thing.
[19:48] If they bring sacrifices, God will bring them forgiveness. Instead of trusting in God for forgiveness and salvation, they trust in religion, cold religion, and religious rituals instead.

So what will God do as a judgment? He flips it around. What was the sacrifice for? It's for forgiveness of sin so that God might not remember their sins, but here he will remember their sins. And they will return to Egypt. Not literally. Egypt is code for slavery and oppression. And Israel will be under the oppression of Assyria, and then Babylon, and then Persia.
So the freedom that God has given them through Moses will be taken away from them because they have rejected God who has freed them. And the sacrificial system won't work without a relationship with God.
Again, I wonder whether this is a dangerous temptation for religious people like us too. It's possible for us to think that if we just do the rituals, go to church every Sunday, take Holy Communion, give money, we will be saved.
[21:18] But no, that means we put our faith not in the God who saves, but in our religious efforts, our own religious efforts. Religion is a wonderful gift when it helps us to know God relationally.

Religious rituals are wonderful gifts. If they help us to know God relationally. But religion becomes a terrible idol when we use it to avoid trusting God and so that we can control the outcome of our salvation using our own religious efforts.
That's a dangerous idol. And so the three signs of a prosperous society have been destroyed. Israel has trusted in political power, economic power through Baal, and religious power, and they're all destroyed.
What's left? Military! Military power. Last verse, verse 14. Israel has forgotten their maker and built palaces.
Judah has fortified many towns, but I will send fire on their cities that will consume their fortresses.
Israel and Judah both rely on military strength rather than God.
[22:45] Again, there's nothing wrong with military strength or the effort to defend our own people, but notice that they trust in their military strength while forgetting God.

And so God turns things upside down again. Their cities and fortresses will be destroyed and burned. In fact, in chapter 10, God says, because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors, the roar of battle will rise against your people so that all your fortresses will be devastated.
Military power cannot protect them because they have forgotten God, their true protector. So in these three chapters, Israel trusts in all four pillars of a prosperous society, economic, military, political, and religious while kicking God out of the picture.
And so God strips away everything they trust, exposing the truth that none of these pillars can save them without him. It's a scary truth and I think we ought to be scared as well if we think we know God, if we claim that we know God but our knowledge is merely theoretical or ritual but not intimate trusting knowledge.
Now, is there a solution? Yes, there is. Like Hong said, in every single passage of judgment, judgment, there's always a little bit of mercy and grace.

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[24:37] But that little bit of mercy and grace overcomes everything. So let's go near the end of chapter 10. God says, God calls his people to return to him and sow righteousness.

Remember the image before about sowing the wind nothingness? righteousness. Well, here, God calls them to sow righteousness. That is, go back to the covenant law for the Old Testament so that they might reap the unfailing love from God.
That's what the Old Covenant says. If they return to God, God will do the right thing by showing them love again. instead of trusting their own strength, they are to return to their covenant relationship with God.
That's what it means to break the unplowed ground like soil that hasn't been worked for years. It's become hard. And that's what Israel needs to do with their heart.
Their heart has become hardened by idolatry, so it's time for them to return and soften their hearts again, to remember their first love, so to speak.
[26:16] If we have been trusting in things other than God, that's what we need to do. It's time to repent, to seek God with softened hearts.

If the Israelites do that, God says that he will come and shower righteousness on them. what does that mean? God's righteousness refers to him acting rightly according to his covenant.
And therefore, he's going to offer faithful love, acceptance, if they repent. But what's amazing is how this promise finds its fullest fulfillment in Jesus Christ, where God did indeed come to his people literally, physically, bodily, as a human in the person of Jesus.
And he did indeed shower his righteousness on those who trust him, not just by doing what's right according to the covenant, but in Jesus he gives his righteousness to us.
He showers his righteousness on us. So the righteousness that belongs to Jesus, Jesus is the only one who is perfectly righteous, who has done the right thing all the time.
[27:41] That righteousness is given to us. And the whirlwind that we deserve because we have trusted in things other than God, that whirlwind was taken by Jesus on the cross.

That is the gospel. That is God. So God did not just tell his people to be righteous and then left them alone to figure it out.
He has come to us in the person of Jesus Christ. He has provided the righteousness that we needed. And he has opened the way for us to know him relationally and intimately.
Isn't that what Jesus says in John 14? If you know me, you know my Father. There's a physical, tangible way of knowing God, and that is in Jesus.
Knowledge of God is provided in Jesus. Righteousness is provided in Jesus. Everything is provided in Jesus. And so we can claim that we know God only if we know Jesus.
[28:52] Not only theoretically, but knowing Jesus and trusting him and obeying his word. So do you know God truly, intimately, exclusively?

let's pray. Father, we thank you for this reminder of the kind of knowledge that you are looking from your people.
And we thank you for giving us your son, Jesus Christ, through whom we can know you in the way that you want us to know you. So help us, Lord, with the power of your spirit to seek you and seek to know you more and more through Jesus.
In his name alone we pray. Amen.

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