

The Turning

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. I encourage you to open the Bibles again at page 739, 739, and this is the last chapter of Hosea and the final of our six sermons from this Old Testament prophet.

Over the years I've seen the anguish of parents with wayward children in different ways. Sometimes families here where there's a deep estrangement, often in one sense inexplicable.

I've been to funerals where the parent has died and the children are completely estranged from the parent and there's huge tension between parents and children.

Even in my own family, the same with my father and one of my sisters who he didn't see for the last 20 years or so of his life. And the same with estranged wives and husbands as well.

Well, many of you have felt some of that deep pain and most of us would know people who have experienced that in some way or other. In the book of Hosea, we see the same agony in the heart of God.

[1 : 17] And over the last five weeks we have seen two main analogies or illustrations to show that. God as the husband of a prostitute wife, Israel, his people, who keep going after other gods.

And then last week in particular, God as a father whose child Israel, the people of God, have rejected him and turned far from him.

And all through this book we see the tension within the heart of God to bring what is justly deserved by way of punishment and discipline and judgment on his people.

And yet at the same time, a heart that still loves despite all the rejection. And a heart that is learning and longing for his people to come back to him.

Here in this final chapter, we see that same loving yet agonizing heart of God being exposed to us. It's a heart of God that we don't see quite as deeply in the Old Testament as we do here in Hosea perhaps.

[2 : 24] But we certainly see more fully also in the New Testament as well. This is a book of prophecy that has rung with the rebuke of Israel's sin, its prostitution as it's gone after other gods.

It's denounced its spiritual disloyalty. In fact, its lack of loyalty or faithfulness or love for God has been a constant recurring theme in different images and echoes.

There is no knowledge of me. You do not have steadfast love for me. Your love is like dew that just dries up very quickly. There are some of the illustrations that we've seen over these last few weeks.

This has been a book of strident warnings of impending judgment. And indeed, within just years of Hosea's words, the nation of Israel was destroyed never to rise again, in effect, the northern kingdom.

But periodically in this book, we have seen, as I said a couple of weeks ago, like a dark sky of judgment, almost incongruously little shafts of sunlight peeking through the deep clouds.

[3 : 34] We've seen glimpses of that here and there through the book. And then perhaps most fully here in this final chapter, chapter 14, as the words of warning give way to words of wooing.

As God wants to woo back and bring back to himself his wayward people. Chapter 14 begins, return, O Israel, to the Lord your God.

Return. A common word in Hebrew language. The word that would be used if you turn right down a street or turn left. A word that would be used to say, I'm returning home after being out.

Very basic word. And yet, a word here and in other parts of the Old Testament that is laden with spiritual or theological significance.

For it is the word that suggests repentance. It's the word that means repentance in the Old Testament. To turn back to God.

[4 : 35] And that's what the language is expressing here. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. We saw a glimpse and hint of that in the beginning of chapter 6, two weeks ago in this series.

But now we see it again here in chapter 14. Return to the Lord your God. In effect, God is wanting Israel to come back to him, to come back home to him in effect.

He's saying, come back to me. Come back home. Like the father about a prodigal child, for example. Come back to your God. It's actually still deeply personal language.

Verse 1 says, return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. That's remarkable in a way. For through this book we have seen that Israel persistently and defiantly keeps going after other gods.

The pagan gods, the gods of the Canaanites who are in the land. But yet here, despite all of that spiritual adultery and idolatry, God says, return to Yahweh your God.

[5 : 50] It's remarkable too. Because back in chapter 1, one of the names that Hosea was to give to his children was not my people.

Strange name to give to a child. But it suggested the breaking of the relationship between God and Israel. No longer are you my people. And the corollary of that always is, and you and I am no longer your God.

But here again, this merciful, steadfastly loving God says, return to the Lord your God. The relationship still is on offer to wayward Israel even here.

Throughout this book we've seen the word turn or return, same word in fact, used a number of times. In chapter 7, they have turned to that which does not profit them.

That is, to Assyria or Egypt, other nations, to try and buy security as a nation. To no avail. Chapter 11, we saw last week.

[6 : 57] That they have refused to return to God. Therefore, God will return them to Egypt. Standing for captivity under what would be Assyria a few years later.

Israel has turned to other things. God has beckoned them to turn back to him. If they fail, he will return them to captivity.

But if they accept, we'll see that in a minute. Despite all their intransigent sin, it is clear that these words at the beginning of chapter 14 are still, even at the last minute, at the death knell of the nation, urging them to come home.

To turn back. Despite the inevitability of judgment, even here, it is not too late for them to turn back to God.

Sometimes we might say, well, it's never too late. But it is with God. Not quite here. But the judgment day is coming when the nation is destroyed.

[8 : 08] And then it is too late. Just as the same that the judgment day of the Lord's return is coming. One day soon. We do not know when. And then it will be too late.

But for now. Repent. Turn. Return to God. Is the word of Hosea. Stop stumbling in your iniquity. The end of verse one says. That is falling. Their sin is bringing the nation down. Their sin is bringing themselves down. They have paid off the wealth of the nation to try and buy security to no avail. They have lost land in the process. And the nation has plunged from being relatively wealthy at about 750 BC to nothing at all by 720. And much of it annexed to Assyria in 733.

It is a quick decline. They really have stumbled in their sin and fallen. They have lost their strength. We saw the beautiful analogy two weeks ago.

[9 : 15] That they are full of grey hair. Meaning that their nationhood is coming to old age frailty and decline and death. But they do not even see it. Because they are blind when they look in the mirror.

They have stumbled in their iniquity. Well God here despite all this sin. Is a beckoning and wooing God.

It's a consistent picture of God in the Bible. Often he's caricatured as squashing down on everything. A God of judgment and wrath and anger. And yes that's true.

And at the same time. A beckoning and wooing God. We see it throughout the old. We see it more fully in the New Testament.

How the Son of God came. To beckon to come home. To seek and save the lost. To come for the unwell and the sick. Not for the righteous. To urge them to come back to God.

[10 : 15] To come home. Well so senseless and spiritually dull is Israel. That God in effect gives them the words of repentance. We saw that glimpsed also in chapter 6 two weeks ago.

Here it is again. Take words with you. Verse 2 says. And return to the Lord. Not just any words. This is not like a magic formula.

Don't sort of think that this is a mechanical thing. That all we have to do is recite the prayer in the prayer book. And bingo God's forgiven us and welcomed us back. No. The words here are to be

sincerely meant and said.

But it's explaining what turning to God means. Take away all guilt. That is acknowledgement of your own guilt.

It sounds easy. And yet how hard it is. How often when we are guilty. We want to blame someone else.

[11:18] Dear God I've failed today. I got a bit angry with my wife or husband. And I am sorry for that. But she did provoke me. And I didn't have a good night's sleep because of the kids. And work was pretty stressful.

And I'm not feeling very well at the moment. And the weather. That's not taking away all guilt. That's finding excuses. But we do it all the time. We blame our spouses. Our parents for our upbringing. Our children. Our boss at work. We blame the government usually. And the weather. And our health. And our hormones. And everything. We have to be careful you see.

When we are repenting. That we are saying. God I'm guilty. Take away my guilt. That we don't cover it around.

And mold it into a sort of an excuse. That's not confession of sin. It's not repentance from sin. Either. Take away all guilt.

[12:13] Accept that which is good. And we will offer the fruit of our lips. Words of praise. That come from the heart. Is the implication. Not a magic formula. That's insincerely intended.

Notice that there's no sacrifice here. Not that God didn't command sacrifices earlier. But remember what we saw two weeks ago. I desire mercy or steadfast love.

Not sacrifice. The knowledge of God. Rather than burnt offerings. God wants hearts that love him. Primarily. Not some religious ritual to paper over the sins.

In effect what is being urged here in Hosea. Was modeled a few centuries before. By King David. In his famous Psalm 51. After his adultery with Bathsheba.

Oh Lord open my lips. And my mouth will declare your praise. For you have no delight in sacrifice. If I were to give a burnt offering. You'd not be pleased. The sacrifice acceptable to God.

[13:13] Is a broken spirit. A broken and contrite heart. Oh God you will not despise. That in essence. Is what Hosea is urging here. A broken heart.

Sincerely intended words of contrition. And repentance. Well this repentance. This turning. Becomes more explicit in verse 3.

Assyria shall not save us. Why should that be a statement in a statement of repentance? Because they have thought that Assyria would save them. They've gone after Assyria.

Time and again. For help. For security. For political salvation. To no avail. Repentance means saying. That is wrong. What we were saying. And doing. And turning. And now I turn to God.

And I say. Assyria shall not save us. That's what repentance is about. Repentance is not feeling sorry. That we did a wrong thing. But doing it again. Repentance is turning away.

[14:11] Away from something. I used to say. Assyria will save us. I recognise that is wrong. God alone will save us. I'm turning to God. The second line of verse 3. Says that.

We will not ride upon horses. That's a strange thing. Isn't it? To say. In a statement of repentance. Some of you may be horse riders. And feel offended by this. But what riding upon horses is.

If you like. A sort of slogan or idiom. For political or military might. Often associated with Egypt in fact. So here it's saying. Assyria will not save us.

Egypt will not save us. That is political salvation. Is a misnomer. It's a myth. God alone will save us. God alone will save us. Thirdly. In the. Verse 3. It says.

We will say no more. Our God. To the work of our hands. That's ridiculous. When you think of it. That somehow. You can mould something. With your hands.

[15:06] And say. This is my God. When it's made by human hands. By saying. It's made by human hands. Exposes the complete stupidity. Of idolatry. So.

Israel. In repentance. Is turning away. From. Assyria. And Egypt. For political salvation. It's turning away. From idolatry. The worship of. Stone pillars. Or timber.

Or pots. Or something. That they've made. Turning to the living God. And then the final line. Of verse 3 says. And let. And in you.

The orphan. Finds. Mercy. The orphan. Is helpless. And in need. Of mercy. Mercy.

Is undeserved. If it's something. That's deserved. It is not mercy. Here is a statement. Of helplessness. Before God. An emptiness.

[16:02] Before God. And saying, God. I need mercy. I'm orphaned. Because I've had no. Spiritual parent. In a sense. Through my sinful behavior.

You see. You see. God. Doesn't help those. Who help themselves. So much. As helps. The helpless. As we saw. In the couple of weeks. Ago as well.

Repentance. Means. Coming to God. Saying. God. I need mercy. I am guilty. I'm turning away. From where I thought. I'd find salvation. And I'm turning to you.

I'm like a helpless. Orphan. Show me mercy. Nothing in my hand. I bring. Helpless. Come to you. For grace.

Back in chapter one. When the naming of. Hosea's children. Was told to us. One of them. Was to be called. Lohruhamah. I will have no mercy. Or no compassion.

[16:59] Or pity. But now. There is this plea. To God. For mercy. A mercy. That comes freely. But with justice. Out of the.

End of the. Northern kingdom. Of Israel. Out of their judgment. God's mercy. Comes. And rises. These words. Of verse two.

And three. Are hypothetical. In a way. They follow. The call. To God. Return. To the Lord. This is what. Repentance. Looks like. Now. By way. Of incentive.

To repent. Comes. Well. What will be the outcome. Of that. And verse. Four to seven. Gives us. A depiction. Of that outcome. I will heal.

Their disloyalty. That's what we've seen. Echoed. Through this book. In fact. The God is not simply. Going to say. Okay. Well I forgive you. And off you go. And keep on living.

[17:52] And they're. They're just the same. But that as people. Repent. And turn to God. He heals them. Not. Simply physically. But he heals. Their disloyalty.

That is. He changes their heart. Heart. And we've seen echoes of this. Through the book. Back in chapter two. The image of betrothal gifts. At a wedding. And God would give them.

The gifts of faithfulness. And mercy. And steadfast love. That is. God would change their heart. Elsewhere in the book. God would heal them. Bind them up. Bandage them. Cure them.

And that's what God is in the business of doing. So what an astonishing picture of salvation this is. That as people repent of their sins. And come to God for mercy.

They find not simply forgiveness. Though great that is. But they find the powerful grace of God. Changing the heart. From being faithless to faithful.

[18:48] Lacking mercy to merciful. Loveless or love like the Jew. To being a steadfast enduring love. From being disloyal. To having their disloyalty.

Healed here. In verse four. And I will love them freely. For my anger has turned from them.

If finally Israel turns to God. God's anger will turn away from them. No longer the objects of judgment. But the recipients of God's mercy.

God's mercy. What follows then. Is a beautiful picture of restoration. A picture of blessing. A picture of restoration.

After exile and judgment. The language is evocative. Attractive and beautiful. It reminds us of the promise. It reminds us of the promise blessings.

[19:46] For obedience to God's laws. In the covenant of Moses. So when we've seen the statements of judgment. That come out of Deuteronomy 28. Throughout Hosea.

What we find here are echoes of the promises of blessing. In Deuteronomy 28. But not just that either. We find here depictions of fertility.

Of safety. Of life. A life of beauty and attraction. Of abundance in the land. And milk and honey. And so on. But there's more.

This is love poetry. The language is in part borrowed from the Song of Solomon. Or the Song of Songs as it's called. It's not just a nice picture.

But a picture of tender love. In the Song of Songs. You get language like dew. Blossom. Lily. Lebanon. Vine. Wine. Shadow. No. All that language is in these verses.

[20:42] Here I think Hosea. In astonishing poetry. Is saying. Here are the abundant blessings. God will pour out upon you. In your restoration. But he uses it in language of love.

To capture the loving heart of God. That is offering. Even at this last minute for Israel. Forgiveness. And restoration.

This same picture. Reverses the statements of judgment. Earlier in the book. In chapter 6. Israel. Had love like the dew.

But now the dew. Will become a symbol of God's blessing. And fertility. In chapter 10. God's litigation against Israel. Would blossom like poisonous weeds.

Here the blossom. Is of abundance and good things. Not poison. In chapter 9. The judgment of God. Would bring barrenness in the land. But now the mercy of God.

[21 : 44] Brings the opposite. Abundance and fertility in the land. Hear these beautiful words. Words of tender love. I will be like the dew to Israel.

He shall blossom like the lily. He shall strike roots like the fruit forests of Lebanon. His shoots shall spread out. His beauty shall be like the olive tree.

And his fragrance like that of Lebanon. They shall again live beneath my shadow. They shall flourish as a garden.

They shall blossom like the vine. Their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon. But even more woven through that beautiful love poetry.

Echoing blessings promised for the future. Is also a renunciation of pagan worship. The pagan gods. The Baals. They were the gods that the pagans thought provided crops.

[22 : 50] And wine. And vines. And forests. And dew. And rain. And so on. But not so. It is Yahweh the God of Israel. The one true living God alone.

Who is the God who provides those blessings of fertility. He alone is the God. Who provides for this world. In fact.

He is the tree providing shadow or shelter. Is part of the image of verse 7. But the Canaanites and the pagans would worship under big trees.

Thinking they were symbols of their God's protection. But not so. It is God who provides protection and shadow from the scorching sun. That's a thread that's developed in the next line of verse 8.

O Ephraim, a name for Israel. What have I to do with idols? The answer that the question begs is nothing. You see one of the sins of Israel was not simply that they reject Yahweh the God of Israel.

[23 : 56] But that they add him onto their mantelpiece list of gods like a trophy. So the Canaanite gods, the pagan gods, they had many gods.

It wasn't an issue for them to add Yahweh in. Well, the more the merrier. Not so. What has God got to do with idols? Nothing at all. Absolutely nothing.

Israel is now addressed in the first person. Before this it was spoken about. So I will heal their disloyalty. But now it's addressed to them directly.

O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? A sense of intimacy in these words now.

An expression of God's grief at their idolatry for so many centuries to this point. Don't turn to the pagan gods.

[24 : 57] Turn to me. Abandon the idols. True fertility comes from me. And as we've seen over these last six weeks.

We are probably not vulnerable to go and get a wooden pole or a stone pillar and bow down and worship it like the pagans did in Hosea's day. But the idols of our world are very captivating.

Very seductive and deceptive. To worship consumerism and possessions and wealth and family and security that we look for in places other than with God.

The pagan idols of our world abound. From the cathedral up on the top of the hill here. All around us. Gods of fun and pleasure.

Hedonistic gods. They're all around us. Seductive. And God could just as easily say to us. What have I to do with your idols?

[26 : 00] O people of Doncaster. O people of the 21st century. Within a few years Israel was destroyed by Assyria. The country so often turned to for help.

Did Israel no favors. Israel was. Assyria was not a god to depend upon. It could not cure or heal. And in 721. Maybe months or a few years after these words of Hosea were spoken.

The country was ended. Its capital destroyed. Its leaders taken into exile. And deported. But Hosea's words were not lost. This book remained.

Most likely it was copied down. Perhaps by some repentant and pious people. And kept and guarded. And quite possibly we know that there were people who fled to the south.

To Judah. To the other part of the people of God. And perhaps there they joined with them. And kept Hosea's words. But Hosea's words did not expire. When Samaria the capital and the north expired either.

[27 : 04] Rather in fact. It seems Hosea's words probably had a sharper focus. As a spotlight moved from the north to the south. For there the warning to Judah. Which had little echoes through this book.

Loomed large. Would God bring Judah to its knees as it had done to Assyria? What would be its fate? The example of the northern kingdom.

Was a solemn warning to the south to get its act in order. And despite the fact that in the next century under Josiah. There were radical reforms. It was too little too late.

140 years after the destruction of the north. The south also fell. So the book of Hosea does not end its relevance. When the northern kingdom ended.

From the start. Hosea is a warning to God's people. In any place and in any time. And the final verse is like an epilogue. That opens it up to the general reader.

[28 : 05] Those who are wise. Understand these things. Those who are discerning. Know them. Who will be wise?

Will the readers in the time of Judah. Be wise. Or later. In later generations. And then the very end of verse 9. Universalizes the whole book.

For the ways of the Lord are right. And the upright walk in them. But transgressors stumble in them. Sounds a little bit like Psalm 1.

Like the early chapters of the book of Proverbs. It's opening up the whole book. To any reader. Of any age. And it forces us to a choice. There are two options.

There are two options basically. To walk in the ways of the Lord. Or to stumble in sin. Rhetorically. The end of this book is forcing us.

[29 : 01] The reader. Centuries later. To engage with the message of Hosea. A still inspired. Word from God. Even to us. So distant in time.

And space. Contemporary Judah failed to heed the warnings. And though its stay of execution was a little over a century. It too fell.

To the hand of Babylon. Who had outplaced Assyria. As the leading power of the age. But even then Hosea's words were not lost. In the destruction of Jerusalem.

And its rubble. But rather still stood through the exile. Through the return. Into the New Testament times. And as we've seen in recent weeks. Jesus himself quotes from this book. Showing its ongoing validity and authority.

And still today. Hosea still stands today. As God's word. To his people. In any time. And in any place. And though we live the other side of the cross.

[30 : 00] The other side of the equator. The other side of history. Hosea still speaks. Those who are wise. Understand these things.

Those who are discerning. Know them. For the ways of the Lord are right. And the upright walk in them. But transgressors. Stumble.

In them. The repentance that this book has urged. On its readers. Including us. Shows that repentance is not mere human choice.

Or will. But rather a repentance that is prompted by the powerful word of God. The repentance that Hosea begged of Israel. Would have been instigated.

And stimulated by the word of God in this book. And it's only when God heals. As we saw in verse 4 today. Is there hope. That theme has echoed through this book.

[30 : 59] Remember back in chapter 2. In the analogy of a marriage. God had pledged betrothal gifts to Israel. To make faithless Israel faithful. To make its fleeting love.

Steadfast love. To give it mercy where it had none. Remember too in chapter 6. In words that prefigure this chapter. Chapter 14.

There too God will heal. He'll bind or bandage up their sin. And raise and revive them on the third day. The healing lay well beyond Hosea's time.

Maybe even. And most likely even. Beyond his expectation. That healing came. Far in the future for Hosea. A healing ironically through death.

Through the death of a servant. Who was despised and rejected. Through whose death. There was healing. And in his raising.

[31 : 58] There was healing in his wings. Hosea is a tragic love story. A cameo of the Bible's great tragic love story. Tragic because the loveless and faithless people of God.

Keep spurning his love. Generation by generation. And yet a poignant story. Because we've seen from the opening words to the end. That God is passionate and deeply loving.

For his wayward people. His love endures steadfastly. Though theirs did not. His faithfulness was far greater. Than the faithlessness of his people.

In this book that exposes so deeply and richly. The heart of God. We find this cameo of the Bible. And this poignant portrait.

Of almighty God. A God who loves. And loves. And loves. To you then. And to me.

[32 : 59] In the 21st century. Far separated from Hosea. In space and time. His words. Still stand. Return.

To the Lord your God. Return. Come back. Come home. And there are many here. Who over the years. That I've been here. Have done exactly that.

Who've come back to God. After years of. Leaving him away. Coming back to the fellowship. Of his people. Back to his word. Back to Christian faith. Who found healing.

And the grace of the cross. There may be others here. Who have not done that. And maybe now. Hosea's words. Are beckoning to your hearts.

Now is the time. To come home. Sometimes we fool ourselves. And think that. Time will always keep going. We'll never be too late.

[33 : 55] With God. But not so. Hosea's words. Have had an urgency. Because the judgment of God. Was imminent. And in 722.

Or 721. The capital and the nation. Fell. Finally. And so too for us. The day of the Lord. Is coming and coming soon.

The day when Jesus. Will return to judge. The living and the dead. Heed the warnings. Before it's too late. And respond.

To his tender beckoning. And wooing. Return. To the Lord your God. Softly. And tenderly.

Jesus is calling. Calling for you. And for me. Patiently. Jesus is waiting. And watching. Watching for you.

[34 : 49] And for me. Come home. Come home. Ye who are weary. Come home. Earnestly.

Tenderly. Jesus is calling. Calling. O sinner. Come home. Wine. Laudatois. Aorem.

Prze. A■■■■aamos. Liza. A sewing. A Buenos. A Martine. M rural. A■■■. Taips box. A citizen. A sewer. Caéri. Oppheaded wake.

boro Mmm.