

Pressing on to Know the Lord

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[0 : 00] Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going out is sure as the dawn. He will come to us as a shower, as the spring rains that water the earth.

This book, the Prophecy of Hosea, in many ways is a tragic book, and yet it's also an inspiring and encouraging book.

Because when we read through it, some of what we read is very much in the form of being judgmental, but also we find that some of it is so compassionate and so encouraging and inspirational.

And one of the things that it shows us is that even people who are richly blessed by the Lord, that people who have experienced God's favor and have found that life has been blessed at every turn, physically and mentally and spiritually, yet these same people can begin to take the blessings of God so much for granted that they begin to abandon God, forget about God, and begin to go down other roads and other paths and fall into idolatry.

And when you look at the history of Israel, it really is quite extraordinary. When you see how God, over and over and over again, made provision for them, blessed them so richly, and as it says in Deuteronomy, that the blessings would overtake them.

[1 : 34] It's a beautiful description. I mentioned that before, we're familiar with it. The Lord is saying, if you will walk according to my ways, I will bless you. And there's a great list of blessings at the beginning of Deuteronomy.

I think it's chapter 28. And it goes on to say that these blessings will overtake you. In other words, you can't prevent these blessings coming upon you if you follow me and walk according to my way. But then the chapter turns, and there are so many woes and curses given to Israel that if they turn their back upon God and abandon God and go down another road and begin to worship the idols that are in the nations surrounding them, then that God's judgment will overtake them, that they cannot prevent it coming on them.

And unfortunately, this is where Hosea is at, because Israel have really turned their back upon the Lord. And it's likened, we're not going to go through all that's shown there, but it's very sort of powerfully shown in the very life of Hosea himself, but it's shown in the form of a faithless marriage. A marriage where the marriage partner, one marriage partner, where one is unfaithful to the other. And it's a heartbreaking story. And that's how the Lord is looking upon Israel, that they're like an unfaithful marriage partner, that the wife has walked away and been unfaithful to the husband.

[3 : 12] So a lot of Hosea makes sad reading, but also side by side with that, there are wonderfully encouraging parts, which shows us that God is a covenant keeping God.

And that although he has to deal with his people and has to deal with them in their backsliding and in their apostasy even, it is always in order to restore, to bring back.

And when the Lord chastises his people, it is always with the purpose of bringing us back, of turning us around, so that we will not be going away from him, but coming towards him.

And he's a covenant keeping God. And that's one of the truths that are shown to us over and over in scripture, that God's patience is quite extraordinary. His covenant love is beyond our comprehension.

And he doesn't deal with us in the way that we deal with one another. We would have given up if people were dealing with us in the way that we're dealing with the Lord. I'm sure we would have said, enough is enough.

[4 : 20] There would come a time when we'd say, I can't, there's nothing more I can do with this person. He's on his own, she's on his own, but the Lord doesn't. He doesn't give up with his people.

So that's one of the wonderful things that we find in this book and we find it right throughout scripture. Now, Hosea includes himself, I believe, and who is speaking here at the very beginning? I'm not altogether sure. Is this a prophet? Or is it the prophet representing the people? Or is this the voice of the people? And I believe it's probably a combination of all because it says here, come, let us return to the Lord for he has torn us that he may heal us.

He has struck us down and he will bind us up. After two days, he will revive us. On the third day, he will raise us up that we may live before him. Now, when you read that, straight away, you say, well, that's great.

This is wonderful to know. Israel have finally seen the light. They have turned and they're saying, right, let's return to the Lord. And you're quite persuaded by reading that, that this is a genuine, heartfelt repentance.

[5 : 41] But you know, when you read through the chapter, I don't think it is. Although it will be, these will definitely be the words of some of the people, definitely the word of the prophet. But although the other, the rest of the people might concur with these words outwardly, inwardly, they don't.

Because when you, if we read through the chapter, for instance, in chapter seven, verse 10, it says, yet they do not return to the Lord. See, they've said, we will come, let us return to the Lord.

The next chapter in verse 10, it says, the pride of Israel testifies to his face, yet they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this.

Although in the previous chapter, they said, we're going to, here we find that actually they're not.

And we find then later on in verse 13, the Lord says, I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me so that their words, however, plausible they are, don't ring through.

See, this confession wasn't the real deal. and they were far more concerned with the healing of the land, with the healing of their own situation, than they were with the healing of their own hearts.

[7 : 00] They wanted God to heal the nation, wanted God to make everything as it was before, but they weren't too concerned about God dealing with them within their heart spiritually.

spiritually. And it's, it's not a, I would say it's one of the dangerous things that we can find even ourselves sometimes in, that we want circumstances to change, but we're not too concerned about the change of our own, our own life and our own heart.

They were more concerned, we could say, with happiness rather than with holiness. As somebody said, they were looking on the Lord like a celestial lifeguard that would deliver them from the danger that they were in, but allow them just to get back to living the way it was before.

And that is not how it is. That's not how God works. That's not what was going to happen. And it's a lesson to ourselves as well. Because as we are in this pandemic, we find that we have to challenge ourselves and say, what has been my response?

Have I looked to the Lord and has my prayer been simply for the restoration of the land, for the healing of the land physically, but that we haven't been looking for a real spiritual reformation beginning with ourselves, beginning with that I have to look and say, beginning with my own heart.

[8 : 38] Is that what I'm doing? Or are we wanting, as Israel were, just wanting life to get back to normal again? That's what they were wanting. Things, they were in a bad place, they were wanting the restoration so that they could get on with living life as they used to.

God says, I don't want you living life as you used to. I want a spiritual reformation in your life and in your heart. And so this is a question that we have to ask ourselves, have we used this time for that spiritual reformation within ourselves?

And again, they thought that this restoration, this restoring process would be really quick because they said, after two days he will revive us, on the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him.

And so there's this idea that everything is going to happen quickly. And again, we might find ourselves, we can be challenged by this because I think we thought that after the lockdown and began to open up again that that's us, we'll get back to normal, but we haven't.

And sometimes God works like that. He operates in a completely different timetable to ourselves. and sometimes we have to, as the scripture says, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that he may exalt you in due time.

[10 : 13] Because we might think we're ready to be exalted to get back. The Lord says, no, you're not. And it's only when God really begins to deal with us we realize the layers and layers and layers of sin in all its various ugly forms that are within us.

Because until the Lord really puts in the surgeon's spiritual knife into her heart and begins to, the incisions begin to start.

And sometimes we're given this little insight into what's really there. We begin to say, whoa, I thought, I thought I was all right. I knew I wasn't all right.

These are not the words, but Lord, I had no idea that I was as twisted and as perverse and as sinful as this. And so sometimes when God allows things to go on, it is in order that we will come eventually to the discovery that he wants us to discover.

And so I think this is part of what what we find here, that there was a great impatience with them and they were wanting that God would deal very quickly with them.

[11 : 33] However, having said all that, these words, of course, we have to apply to ourselves by way of our repentance. They are wonderful words, come, let us return to the Lord, for he has torn us, that he may heal us.

and that's what God does. So we could preach this in a totally different way, but we've got to realize that for many of the people, these words didn't really run through to what was within their heart.

And then in verse 3, it says, let us know, let us press on to know the Lord, and so on. Now, these words are wonderful words, and whether some of them would have said them 100% genuinely, and some of them would have said them superficially.

But I want us just to consider for another few moments, just very briefly, what that is saying. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.

Now, of course, to know the Lord is a great duty and a great desire of our lives once we become Christians. Before we become Christians, we didn't really want to know the Lord.

[12 : 46] We didn't know that by becoming a Christian, it was coming to know the Lord, because we didn't really know what it was to be a Christian. Although we had heard about it, we might have had the desire for it, but we didn't understand that it was coming into a really meaningful, personal, powerful relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

And once we came into that relationship, we came to discover that this is someone we've come to know. But the beauty is that we are never satisfied with the knowing that we have.

Yes, we're satisfied at one level, but we want to know more and more and more. That's the nature of grace. Grace wants to know more.

And one who knew most of all was the apostle Paul, and yet he was never satisfied. And he remembered his great statement that I might know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings and such like.

So even the great apostle, that was his great cry that I might know him. And of course, it's a great mark of the Christian that they're always seeking the Lord, seeking to know more about him.

[14 : 08] And the world can't understand that. When we come to the prayer meeting tonight, yes, it is to worship God. It is to come to pray.

But it is, we come in order that we might know more about him. That's kind of at the heart of what we're here for. We want to know more of the Lord. The world doesn't understand that.

The world doesn't understand why we do what we do. It's kind of like, remember when Moses went to Pharaoh and he asked that the children of Israel might go into the desert to sacrifice to the Lord. And Pharaoh said, he couldn't understand. And he said, it's because you don't have enough work. And of course, they were slaves. They were being beaten up as slaves. It's because they're idle. They don't have enough work. I must give them more work. That's the way he looked on it. And, you know, I think there are people today who will look at us and think it's because we have nothing else to do.

[15 : 14] But there's Christianity. That's something that maybe have a wee look at. It passes a time for them. They don't realize the powerful, meaningful relationship we enter into that changes our life, that changes our future, that sets before us the way to live.

It's revolutionally and it changes everything about us. So what does it mean to press on? Well, it means both holding fast and moving forward.

It involves both things. It involves holding fast and moving forward. So we have to hold fast what we have, but we've also got to be moving forward.

And we need to seek to fan the flame that's within us. That's what Paul was saying to Timothy. You know that a fire, if we don't put fuel on the fire, it will gradually dwindle down until there's barely anything showing.

You've got to keep adding fuel to the fire. And what we're doing here tonight in a sense is we're adding fuel to the fire within our souls, the spiritual fuel that has been given to us from the Lord. [16:37] So in pressing on, it means striving and fighting and wrestling and struggling and running and walking and all these things.

A Christian isn't somebody who should be going in fits and starts and bursts of enthusiasm and then sitting down. There should be a steady progression all the time.

And the Lord has given all of us a great work to do. And you know, that's one of the wonderful things about the church, is that here we are now, here is our local church.

But you know, the local church is at the very heartbeat of the Christian faith. And if you go to the New Testament, you will find that that's the case, that it's always working within the local church. The local churches become part of the great church, the one church. So it's vital that we are engaged where we are.

[17:39] And the Lord has given every single one of us a work to do, to live for him. But as you and I know, we face powerful enemies, far greater than our shepherds.

people are not but we have a God who is more powerful than any enemy. He is at the heart of the resources and he is the one who enables us and provides us with all that we have to do.

And of course, as we press on, we do so as if it depended on ourselves, knowing full well that it doesn't. We have to, as we say, to strive to press all these things.

It's beautifully put in Philippians, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

We are working our way, but it is God who is actually working in us and through us. And God has his own ways of what, you know, God works slowly in us often.

[18:42] You know, sometimes when you look back over your Christian life, you probably thought, as I did, that I would by now, I would be an absolute incredible saint.

And that I would have made so much progress that I would be so holy and I would be so devoted and so committed and that I would be miles ahead of where I am.

And I feel that I'm just still toiling and struggling and I feel that I'm just trying to work my way through the desert. But you see, God could have taken Israel out of Egypt and taken them in a very direct route to the land of Canaan, to the land of Proms.

They could have been there in a short time. But it took 40 years. He took them on a detour and of course we know there was a rebellion and all the rest of it. But he had to work on them.

He had to break them. And there was 40 years of breakage before they were ready to fully enjoy the blessings that he had prepared for them.

[19:50] If they had gone in right away, it would have been a disaster. The blessings would not have been blessings. And that's what God is doing with you and with me as well. He works slowly, but he works surely.

God took six days to create this work. I believe he could have done it in one day. He could have done everything in one day. But he chose to do it in six days. And he could make us instantly and at one time that is going to happen.

The moment that we die and leave this world, the moment that death takes over, we're told that the souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness.

The work that has been going on and on and on and on and on with us, and it changes. And all of a sudden perfection. There is one moment when God changes everything.

But that is at the moment of death. But in this world, it is a progression that goes on. But this is a beautiful thing. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.

[20:58] And you know, if we do press on, we will know the Lord. It's guaranteed. Remember the Lord says, I said not unto the seed of Jacob, seek ye me in vain.

In other words, the Lord never say seek and you will find it will be in vain. Because if you seek, you will find and you will come to discover that the Lord is everything that he said he would be.

He is a Lord who provides for you. He is a Lord who protects you. He is a Lord who goes before you and guides you in everything. and you see his hand in providence.

You know, that's one of the great things about the Christian. You can have a Christian and a non-Christian sitting side by side and the same events of providence are occurring.

And they will see these events with totally different eyes. because when we see the hand of God in everything, you know, that changes life.

[21 : 59] And that's one of the things that happens when we press on to know the Lord, we know his hand. We know his voice. We know these things.

And then we're told here, his going out is as sure as the dawn. You know, you and I are quite sure tonight that if spared, if we're spared, tomorrow we'll see the dawn.

Dawn comes every day. It's one of the things we expect when we go to bed at night. We'll see the dawn. It's an expectation. And so it is for the child of God with regard to the Lord that his going out is as sure as the dawn.

We are persuaded of all the blessings that he will bring. And he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth. I love that.

As we come, press on to know the Lord, the Lord is going to reveal himself to us with showers of blessing. Isn't that great?

[23 : 02] That's what he will bring into our experience and into our life, these showers of blessing. And this is how it is for the people of God.

We're living in a very difficult time. Things are hard. people can really be struggling. And it's like in Habakkuk, chapter 3, it says in verse 17, though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail, and the fields yield no food.

The flock be cut off from the fold, and there be no herd in the stalls. That's a bleak picture. And in a sense, it's almost like where we are today. But this is what Habakkuk says, yet I will rejoice in the Lord.

I will take joy in the God of my salvation. God the Lord is my strength. He makes my feet like the deer. He makes me tread on high places.

That's what the Lord does, even in the midst of the pandemic, even in the midst of the drought, in the midst of the famine, in the midst of the economic turmoil. This is what he can do for his people.

[24 : 18] If we press on to seek the Lord, to know more and more, we will see his hand and we'll be able to rejoice in his salvation, even although all around us may be threatening and uncertain.

That's what he can do for his people. Let us pray. Lord, oh God, we give thanks again for your word and for how timeless it is.

We give thanks for your goodness and mercy to us. We pray that you will take us to our home safely and that you will cleanse us from all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask this.

Amen. Amen. Amen.