

Hosea Chap 14

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[0 : 00] in the prophecy of Hosea, chapter 14. And I want us just to look at the first five verses.

Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to him, take away all iniquity, accept what is good and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.

Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses and we will say no more, our God, to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy.

I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel, he shall blossom like the lily, and he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon.

This prophecy is dealing with, first of all, with the apostasy of Israel, but it finishes with a great hope of God's favor returning upon them.

[1 : 14] And that's one of the wonderful things about God's word. It's a word that's full of hope.

Because often as we come, particularly sometimes on a Sunday as we come, it's one of the wonderful things as we come to church, it gives us time to stop.

We all live very, very busy lives. Lives are full of many things. And sometimes we find it hard to think and to concentrate and even sometimes to grasp, just as we're talking to the young people, to measure up our lives and think, how are we going?

Are we progressing? Are we going forwards or are we going backwards? That's one of the great things as we come together to worship, as we stop and as we reflect.

And it's one of the wonderful things about this day that has been given to us. It's a day for God. A day in all our busyness to think primarily about the Lord.

Yes, it's a day of rest for our bodies and for our minds. It's a day that gives us so many great blessings. But above all, it's a spiritual day.

[2 : 23] And it's important for us to see whether we're going forwards or we're going backwards. Going backwards is not a nice thing in any shape or form. It doesn't matter in what area or avenue of life.

We always want to be progressing, to be moving forward. And unfortunately, there are times where God's people have been going not forwards but backwards.

And this prophecy is dealing with a time like that. It's dealing with Israel's. It's not just that they were going backwards, are we? But it's not just that they had come to a standstill.

They had gone horribly off the rails. And they had involved themselves in every kind of idolatry. And they had abandoned God.

They had turned not only their face but their life away from God. And you would think that the Lord would say, well, that's it.

[3 : 23] Enough is enough. I am handing them over. I am finished with them. They are forevermore blotted out. But God is a covenant-keeping God.

And that's not the way he works. And the wonderful thing about this prophecy, although as we say sometimes you read through it, and it's a prophecy that speaks so much about betrayal and unfaithfulness and everything like that, that at the end the Lord comes back to them.

And the prophet is saying, return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Now, before the Lord, and he's going to forgive them, before the Lord will forgive, and before the Lord pardons, there has to be repentance.

And that's part of what this is all about. There has to be genuine repentance. And that's why it begins by saying, return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. And this word, return, is a very expressive word.

It's not just turn towards, but it's to turn all the way to. It's like if you're going in another direction, and you say, right, I'm going home. It's got the idea of returning all the way back to where you once were.

[4 : 41] And the place where they once were was in the presence and in the favor and in the fellowship with the Lord. And this is what is being said here.

Return, go all the way back. Not just turn around a wee bit or give a token gesture of turning or to turn for a moment. No, it's turning all the way back to the Lord so that everything is involved. It's like your feet are involved and your heart is involved. Your hands are involved. Your mind, everything is involved. Going all the way back. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

And this is one of the great things here. Here, as I said, if we had read through this prophecy, we would see just how absolutely awful things had become.

And yet the words here are, you've stumbled. And you know, that's one of the wonderful things of how God deals with his people is that despite their collapse, despite the fact that they can fall, with regard to his own people, there will ultimately be no fatal fall.

[5 : 59] It's like as it says in Psalm 37, The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.

That's the key. It's the fact that the Lord is upholding with his hand. Still holding. So that although we may fall, we may stumble, there will be no fatal fall to those who are truly united to the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's one of the great things that Scripture teaches. And then it says, Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to him, Take away all iniquity, and so on.

So take with you words. So that the wonderful thing here is that the prophet is actually giving them the actual words that they are to say. Words are important. And when we come in prayer to the Lord, we come with our words.

Now, maybe you're here today and you're saying, Well, I find it very difficult. I don't really know how to pray. And may I say to any in here today who maybe you're saying to yourself, Well, I'm not a Christian.

[7 : 13] I believe the Christian faith. I accept all these things. I come to church because I believe that this is the right thing to do. That's great. But maybe you have a problem with praying.

And you say, You know, I hear people praying, but I don't really know how to pray. I think you do. And it's a very important thing that you do.

And I believe, I believe that there are many people who do pray. And I believe that everybody in here prays. But maybe you feel that your words are unacceptable before God.

That you say to yourself, You know, I can't pray right. Well, I think we've often said it before, but some of the most effective and powerful prayers that we find in the Bible are tiny.

Just a matter of a few words. It's a heart that's important. And when we come to the Lord with a heart that means what we say, we don't need loads of words.

[8 : 11] What we need are words that come from a heart that is meaning what it says. That's what's important. And I think that's one of the things that we have to lay hold upon.

So that even if you just cry, you know, sometimes, sometimes we can be in such agony of heart that we're incapable of articulating any word before the Lord.

Sometimes we can only groan. And sometimes we don't know what to say. But you know, the wonderful thing is the Lord understands that.

He's able to interpret the sigh. And sometimes a groan and a sigh that goes by faith to the Lord is more powerful in the sight of God than many, many words.

Sometimes you might not realize that your groan and your sigh is a groan and a sigh of faith. Because it's not just making a groan of how you feel.

[9 : 18] It's a groan before God. You're sighing before God. There's a hurt before God. And it's ascending heavenwards. There's faith in it.

And the Lord hears and he understands it. And indeed it says the broken spirit is to God a pleasing sacrifice. sacrifice. But here we have where we're given actual words.

And we're told here take with you words and return to the Lord and say to him take away all iniquity. And so this is really the prayer of the penitent.

This is somebody who has come to recognize I'm a sinner. This is not somebody who is kind of in a glib sort of way saying oh Lord and forgive me my sins.

Oh Lord I'm sorry. And that's it. You know sometimes it's often said that sorry is one of the hardest words to say.

[10:22] And that is when we to really mean it. Because we can say it without really meaning it. But here is a heart that means what it says.

It says take away all iniquity. not just some of my iniquity but take away all iniquity. In other words Lord pardon me.

Forgive me my sin. You see it's possible to ask the Lord to forgive us our sin while at the same time our mind going towards sin and enjoying where our mind goes.

At the one hand we can be saying Lord I know I'm a sinner and forgive me my sin and at the same time thinking about sin and hoping to entertain more sin.

That's wrong. That's not what we have here. Here is the penitent coming before the Lord and saying Lord take away all iniquity.

[11:32] take the guilt of my sin away from me. Take the burden of my sin. Take the defilement of my sin.

Take the punishment of my sin. Take the control of sin away from my life. I feel Lord that I'm under its dominion and under its power.

Deliver me Lord from these things. Take away the inclination towards sin. That's all of that when he's saying take away iniquity. All these things that so cripple us in our lives.

Take away Lord all these things sin in all its different forms. Pride and lust and selfish ambition and self-love covetousness.

All these sort of things. Take away all iniquity and accept what is good and we will pay with bulls.

[12:36] And really here the psalmist is describing I think where it's saying accept what is good and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. There's no doubt speaking about the peace offering which we read in the ceremonial law within the whole sacrificial system.

And it was part of in the peace offering where the grateful worshipper was able to enjoy a meal in the presence of God through where they have come in restoration and come back in fellowship. And the Lord is really saying here this is how it's going to be. You're going to bring the sacrifice and the Lord is going to accept you because you've come with a broken heart and here you are back again restored into fellowship into oneness.

It's a beautiful description. And accept what is good. It's translated two different ways and yet they're both tied in together.

One translation has, as we may probably more, or the older people may be more familiar with, where it says receive us graciously. In other words, to receive us or accept us by grace.

[13:49] And that's the grounds that we always come on. That's what we plead. Lord, when we come to the Lord, we're not saying, Lord, receive me because I've done this, I've done that. As we said, we don't measure ourselves against somebody else.

Oh, Lord, receive me because I'm not as bad as that person there or this person there. Lord, receive me according to your grace. That's where we base ourselves.

And that's where the Lord loves us to come because we're not pleading anything of ourselves. Lord, here I am. Warts and all. All my sin and all my failings. But I'm coming to you because you are a gracious God.

You're a God who delights in mercy. And I'm coming. Forgive me my sin. My friend, the Lord will never, ever, ever turn away a person who comes like that. That is somebody coming who has thrown themselves entirely upon the Lord.

Or if we're looking at it here, accept what is good. good, it's got the very same idea because it's not saying, accept what is good of me, but rather, accept what is good that you have actually given me.

[15:04] And that ties in with the whole idea of paying with the bulls and the vows of our lips, of bringing the sacrifice. grace. So that really what we have here is that you bring to the Lord the good that you have that he has already given you.

It's like what David was saying as he was making preparation before he died for the building of the temple and all these things. And David, he was saying to the Lord, of your own we have given to you.

That's what David said, of your own we have given to you. Where David had amassed all this wealth, but he knew it was actually God who had given it to him.

David isn't saying, look at all this money and all this wealth I have and this silver and gold and all these treasures. Well, I've got all these, Lord, I'm going to give them to you. Amidai good.

David didn't think like that. When David was giving all this to the Lord, he was saying, I'm actually giving back to you what you have given to me. Because if you hadn't given them to me in the first place, I wouldn't have this to give to you.

[16:17] You gave me the power, you gave me the might, you gave me the ability to amass this wealth. So David was seeing that everything that he had, he had because God had given it to him.

And this is the whole idea of the grace that we have received graciously. So that both things really mean the same thing, that we're coming to the Lord dependent upon his grace and upon what he has given to us and what he's done for us.

And then the prophet goes on to say, Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, and we will say no more, our God, to the work of our hands.

And here we have evidence repentance, not only in words, but in turning from their idols, turning from idolatry.

Now, when I say turning from idolatry, it doesn't simply mean turning from statues and particular things they may have worshipped, but turning from all the things in their lives that they had come to trust in and had replaced God with, and that's idolatry.

[17:31] When we replace God with other things, that is idolatry. And that's what they were doing. And they were, when it mentions Assyria and Egypt, it's very simple, there's two things there, Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses.

Now, again, that's speaking of Egypt, because apparently in those days, Egypt was the place for horses. In fact, it was one of the warnings that was given when God had established the kingdom, when Israel asked for a king.

One of the things that God was saying, they weren't to go to Egypt for horses. In other words, the Lord was, they were to rely upon the Lord. The horses, of course, were for warfare, for the cavalry and such like.

Assyria was the great power. Of course, we know there were various world empires at different times that were in ascendancy. Assyria were a fearfully warlike nation who were known for their cruelty and their ferocity and their power.

And as often happened in these days, when one nation would be under threat, they would enlist the help of another. No doubt, they would obviously have to pay dearly for it. So that Israel, the way they were living, they were looking to other nations.

[18:59] They were not looking to the Lord. They had taken their focus completely off God, no dependence whatever upon them. They were going to rely upon the other nations, upon the power, the ferocity, the might of Assyria and Egypt and providing them with the horses.

And so very simply they're saying, we've changed that. No longer are we going to rely on Assyria. No longer are we going to rely upon the power of these horses.

Our focus is going to be upon the Lord. We will say no more, our God, to the work of our hands.

And that's very simply where man had taken the place of God.

Where they were looking to themselves, to their own wisdom, to their own abilities. to their own initiative to get themselves out of whatever situation they were in.

You know, nothing's changed. That's exactly where we are today, isn't it? Because as you look at our land and the way things are run.

[20:12] Now, I can't, obviously we can't speak and we know that it's not true of everybody who's in office and everybody who's in power and all our MPs and MSPs, we're not saying that of everybody, but so often as it certainly seems to be portrayed to us in the media, that there seems to be not looking to the Lord for direction.

That it's always looking to institutions, looking to man. Man has replaced God. God is not in the national picture, in the great scheme of things.

things. And we're always looking, we see they're going to try this and try this and try that and try the next thing. And at the end of the day, the way it's looking is like drunk men reeling.

They reel and stagger like one drunk. And that's really how it is, reeling from one crisis to the next.

And so it will go on perpetually until man looks up and cries to the Lord.

right throughout the Bible, nation after nation after nation discovered that. And generation after generation after generation discovered that in Israel's history.

[21 : 24] It is impossible to really prosper, to develop, to flourish, to know the safety and security that a nation can enjoy if we do not look to the Lord.

righteousness exalts a nation. That's what the word tells us. And that's what must be our prayer, that our nation will come back to that.

And while we look at it nationally, we must also look at it individually, personally. Is it possible that I, in my own life, have displaced God from the center?

And that I'm looking to myself, that I'm making the decision? It's possible within the church. The church must always guard against this. This can be one of its great failures, looking at its own wisdom and making its decisions purely on its own thinking, rather than seeking to be molded into the thinking and into the way of the Lord.

So, we find that Israel are at this point, they're saying, well, here we are, Assyria shall not save us, we will not ride on horses, and we'll say no more, our God, to the work of our hands.

[22 : 47] And in you the orphan finds mercy. The orphan is very simply the passion who is most vulnerable, the passion who has lost most, a passion who has lost father and mother, the passion in those days there was nothing.

it's still just such a tragic place for any person to be, to be an orphan. And yet, the Lord is saying, to the one who is in the poorest condition, the one who is broken hearted and most vulnerable, that person in the land will find mercy in me.

And then the Lord goes on to say, I will heal their apostasy. Now, apostasy is looked here as, sin is looked here as a disease, because it's talking about healing.

And that's what sin is, it's a disease. The Bible, remember how it talks about Jesus as the great physician, the great doctor. And that's who Jesus is.

He is the one who heals us from our disease, the great disease of sin. Who thy diseases all and pains, as we sang, will heal and they relieve.

[24 : 04] And I will love them freely. The word freely means very simply that the Lord loves of himself.

He chooses to love. He loves when there is nothing lovely to love. That's loving freely.

There's nothing, here's the object of his love. and as he looks upon the object of his love, there is nothing attractive or beautiful or drawing or winsome in the object of his love.

There is nothing that would in and of itself draw love from him. That's who we are.

There's nothing in us and of us that would automatically draw love from the heart of God. But he chooses to love us. He loves us freely.

[25 : 07] That's what's so amazing. God is love. And God loves freely. Remember how it says in Revelation, who loved them and washed them from their sins.

We would expect it to be the other way around. I've said this before, you wash them up and make them lovely. Ah, I didn't realize how beautiful that person was. It's once I washed them away then, oh, I can love them.

But no, it's the other way around. He first of all loves them because he loves them freely. And as he loves them, it's then he washes them and makes them clean.

It's beautiful and of course continues to love them. And so this is what he's saying. I love them, I love them freely. For my anger has turned from them.

This of course speaks of that great word propitiation. There are many things that were involved in Christ's work on the cross. One of these things was a work of propitiation where that is dealing with God's wrath.

[26 : 16] Where the wrath of God is turned away from us. And where was God's wrath turned from turned on to Christ.

That's what happened. God's wrath which was to bear down upon us was turned away upon him.

That's what propitiation is, the turning away of God's wrath and was turned on to the Son.

And this is how God loves. So his anger, my anger, for my anger has turned from them. And may I say to anybody in here today who doesn't know Jesus still as their own personal Savior, this is what he's offering you.

He's offering to love you. And you know, I can't tell you there's nothing more beautiful and wonderful in the world than to know the love of God in Jesus Christ in your own heart.

God. That makes all the difference to your life. That doesn't mean that your life is going to be free from troubles and problems and pains.

[27 : 26] But it means that you belong to a God who loves you and a God who works all things. He'll work all things together for good.

That doesn't mean that everything that happens in your life is going to be good. But God is going to work these things for good. And that's a wonderful thing.

And so then goes on and says just very very bit time is going. I will be like the Jew to Israel. He shall blossom like the lily and he shall take roots like the trees of Lebanon.

Now I will be like the Jew to Israel. Now there's I suppose many different pictures that we can have here about the Jew.

One of the things is the continuity of life. That's what Jew does. You know if you go to some of the countries, the hot countries, Middle East countries, and you say to yourself how do these shrubs and how do these plants continue in life?

[28 : 36] Because every day it's so hot. But through the night there's the dew. And the dew brings that moisture which enables life to continue.

It's an amazing thing, part of God's provision. And it's the same spiritually. God will make his spiritual life, there's going to be continuity.

You know there are times, times sometimes we think what is happening to the cause of Christ. Is it going to disappear? No. It might not flourish in our own land the way it did, but it's flourishing in other parts of this world.

The church is growing at the most extraordinary rate in other areas of this world. In China and in India and South America and other parts of this world, the Christian church is flourishing and growing in ways that would almost take our breath away.

The Lord, and that's what it's in Psalm 72, they shall fear thee as long as sun and moon endure throughout all generations. We may fear that the cause of Christ will disappear.

[29 : 53] No, as long as the sun and moon endure throughout generations, the cause will maintain. And again, dew revives. You look at plants and they become, they're beginning to droop and they're beginning to look withered.

And then the dew falls upon them and there again, they're lifted up. And that's what the Lord does. The Lord revives his people. He brings into us times where our soul becomes vibrant again.

The thrill of the gospel. You might be here today and you're feeling down and you're flat and you're saying, you know, where is the love that once I knew when first I saw the Lord.

Oh, I remember days where I just thrilled under the gospel. My heart was full of the Lord. Today you think I've got the heaviest boots possible and that are dragging me down and I'm just so struggling. Well, here's the Lord saying, I will be like the Jew unto Israel. He will revive his people. He will bring, he won't leave you like that.

[31 : 03] Of course, there's our own side to it as well. And again, the Jew is a quiet work. You're not aware of the Jew. You know, if you're out at night, you're not aware.

You're always aware when it's raining. You feel the rain. If you're out during the day, you see the rain and you feel the rain and the impact of it. And sometimes as we often have here, it's driving rain.

But the Jew is different. And if you're out in the Jew, if you're out through the night, you begin to say, my word, you begin to feel it damp.

You go out and you feel the grass and it's soaking. And you say, that's extraordinary. I never felt anything. When you stand there and you say, I'm not feeling anything. And yet, the Jew is falling. It's a quiet work. And that's the way the Lord works. The Lord works in this quiet way. And that's one of the things that church has to learn.

[32 : 00] It's not by the open display. There are times the Lord will manifest himself in a very powerful way. But more and more, it's a quiet work.

And the Lord's blessing here, and he's blessing there, and he's converting one here, and he's dealing with another person there. And sometimes others are saying, oh, nothing's happening. And the Lord's working, and he's throwing one here and one there.

It's like the Lord said to Nicodemus, the wind blows where it wants. You hear the sound, but you can't tell where it's coming from or where it's going. So is the Spirit of the Lord. That's the way the Lord works.

