

Hard Work giving Good News

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[0 : 0 0] 10 and read at verse 11 and verse 12 there. Oseah chapter 10 at verse 11. Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck.

! But I will put Ephraim to the yoke. Judah must plough, Jacob must harrow for himself. Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, that he may come and reign righteousness upon you.

There are perhaps certain books that you go to in the Bible, and you can turn to them, and there's always a danger of feeling a sense of despondency and a sense of despair.

Books like the book of Acts, and you see great things happening in the book of Acts. See the early chapters of the book of Acts, and you find thousands being added to the church in one day.

And you say to yourself, how can that be discouraging? Well, it's because when you're reading it, you think to yourself, if only we were seeing days like that ourselves.

[1 : 1 4] We feel a sense of despondency, wishing that the Lord would pour out his blessing in that way. We would see thousands added to the church in one day.

So if we don't see it happening, we maybe begin to question ourselves, to question our prayers, to question things that we're doing, to question maybe even God. Where is God in the midst of everything that's going on in our day?

And you ask, do we live in the days that they lived in the days of Acts? Do we live in a similar kind of time? Well, we do, but we don't always see it.

The media doesn't present great things happening for the gospel around the world. The main media, that is. But if you listen to people, missionaries from around the world, if you listen to people who are going out with the gospel around the world, even in our own nation, there are great things happening.

The Lord is working. And so we shouldn't lose heart, because the good news is going out and people are responding. So maybe we don't see it in our own midst, maybe we don't see it in the way we would long to see it, but the Lord is still working.

[2 : 2 8] Whether it's thousands, whether it's one or two, we are constantly reminded that the Lord is working. So there can be a sense of despondency when things are good, but there are other books that you can turn to, and you can feel a sense of despondency because things are so bad.

We see it very often throughout the Old Testament, and here's another example of it. We looked at Habakkuk recently, and we were seeing there how things were so difficult, and here the day of Hosea.

As well, it was a difficult time. But I want us to reflect this evening on Hosea and the hardships that he had to endure, and just to see how it still gives us hope.

It's a book that's full of many difficulties, difficulties for Hosea himself and difficult days for God's people, and yet we still see God at work.

And if we were to ask ourselves, do we see this kind of day in our own experience just now, we would say yes. The gentlemen have been praying. We've been reminded of so many situations around our nation or around the world that show us the kind of despondency and despair that we live in, the uncertainty of the world in which we live, the pain and grief that's around us both in a local sense but also nationally and internationally.

[3 : 5 2] There's so much going on that would leave us thinking, where can we go? How can we go forward? And that's very much the kind of day that Hosea was living in.

But what you see is God is faithful. God is still with him, and God is still calling a people to himself. And you see it very much here in verse 12 of chapter 10.

So for yourselves righteousness, reap steadfast love. This is a reminder here of God's covenant love towards his people. For it is time to seek the Lord.

So it's clear that people have been going away from the Lord. They've turned their back on the Lord, and he's saying it is time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you, that you might know his blessing.

And it was Hosea that was called into this ministry as a prophet. And Hosea, with his own life, as we'll see in a moment, he didn't find it easy to do it.

[4 : 58] He didn't come into it in an easy background either, and yet God used him in a powerful way, and yet he had to be faithful. He had good news to give, but what he found was a people who didn't want to hear.

And that can resonate with ourselves today as well. Think of the Gideons, or good news for everyone as it's called now, putting out Bibles, putting out the word of God to people, individuals, to schools, to hospitals, hotels, all of these things used to be so easy for them to get the word of God in.

And yet now people are saying, we don't want it. Or if they take it, they put it in a corner somewhere, so that then if somebody asks, they can get a Bible. Whereas it used to be in many hotels, you'd go in, you'd open the drawer, you'd find it on the bedside cabinet, there would be a Bible there.

There is good news, but people don't want to receive it. And that's the same for Hosea. He had great news to give the people, but they had so turned their back on God that they didn't want to hear.

And it's hard work for him, but yet he stays faithful to the course. And it's a reminder to ourselves, in whatever we are doing for the Lord, to stay faithful to him, and to trust him, and to serve him, both faithfully and cheerfully.

[6 : 24] In Colossians chapter 3, verse 17, it says, whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. So we are to be faithful in the name of Jesus.

But it also says, giving thanks to God the Father through him. So there's to be a sense of thanksgiving, a sense of delight and cheerfulness in what we are doing for the Lord.

We are serving our King. We are serving our Lord. And so Hosea worked in the midst of great difficulty, but with that great assurance that he was serving his Lord.

And when you see the people, it's reflected in what they wanted in society in verse 3 there. For now they will say, we have no king, for we do not fear the Lord.

They don't want God, but they don't want a king over them either. In a natural way, and a king, what could he do for us? There's this sense of confidence in themselves, and in what they are doing for themselves.

[7 : 27] We don't need the Lord. We don't need a king. We can look after ourselves. And that's the world today as well. We don't need the Lord. We don't need anybody to rule over us.

We can get on fine by ourselves. But the gospel is what was needed here, the good news, and it's the good news that our world needs today.

And in Hosea here, we just want to see three things that we can take from these verses, verse 11 and 12. Three things that remind us just to be faithful in the midst of difficult days.

And the first thing we see is that we are in difficult days, and Hosea was in a difficult day. But then we see it was a day of dedication, a day of devotion, a day of giving to the Lord.

And then thirdly, we see a day not to despair, a day not to despair. So it was a difficult day first. If you know anything of Hosea, maybe you know his own background, his own life, his home situation wasn't easy.

[8 : 36] We see that in chapter one of this book. Hosea's family life was far from straightforward. He was told by the Lord to take a wife who was unfaithful, and then he had children.

And you look at the names of the children, and they reveal so much of what was going on in his own experience, but also it was reflecting the nation of the Lord.

So you see that in chapter one. You see in verse two down to verse 11 there, it speaks about Hosea's home setting. And he had children.

One was called Jezreel, and behind that name was, it means I will scatter. I will scatter. Then he had a daughter, and she was called Lo-ru-ama, which means no mercy, as you see it here in English.

No mercy is the name of the daughter. And then another son, Lo-ami, which means not my people. And this is just reflecting what's going on around us, a people, as a nation.

[9 : 48] That the Lord is showing a people who are unfaithful to him. And through his children, he's showing what he's going to do. He's going to scatter his people.

He's not going to show mercy to his people. And he's going to say, you are not my people. So as you are rejecting me, this is the outcome. And so Hosea's life was a witness, was showing the people just what their relationship of the people with God was like.

They have turned their back on God, just like we saw there in verse 3 of chapter 10. We have no king. We do not fear the Lord.

So we don't need anything from God. There was this disobedience. But because of this, there was consequences. And you see that as you read through.

In chapter 8, for example, it's very much a vine that is being described here as the people. And the vine is not bearing fruit or it's bearing sour fruit.

[10 : 55] And in chapter 8, verse 7 and 8 and verse 14, you see it very much seen there that in verse 14, for example, Israel has forgotten his maker and built palaces.

And Judah has multiplied fortified cities. So I will send fire upon his cities and I shall devour her strongholds. It's very much a sense of judgment.

The people have broken the covenant with God. They have forgotten their maker. They have replaced God with an idol in the form of a calf.

Verse 5 and 6 of chapter 8 say that to us and also verse 5 of chapter 10. So they're more concerned about this golden calf that their idol that they've made than the fear of losing God.

And what you see is the complete turnaround from the people. Instead of, and there's two place names that are important here as well.

[12 : 07] First of all, you have Bethel. And Bethel is the place where God is worshipped. And that's what the people had had. The place that they would worship God.

It's mentioned in verse 15. Bethel's mentioned there. But they have turned from Bethel, the place they worship God, to Beth-Avon. And this means the place of wickedness.

So they've turned away from the place of worshipping God. And they've turned instead to the place of wickedness, the house of wickedness.

So everything that we're seeing here is outlining the relationship of the people to God. A difficult day. But is our own day any different?

Because we're seeing almost exact same things. We do not fear the Lord. What can a king do for us?

[13 : 11] We've turned away from Bethel, the place of worshipping God, to Beth-Avon, the place of wickedness. And you see it in so many different ways.

Where the vine that was once here has not been tended. The vine of the word of God. Because we have known God's favour. We have known God's blessing.

But the vine has been turned away from. And we're, instead of tending it, we've just abandoned it. We've abandoned God. And we're bearing sour fruit.

You think of places. The place of worship of God, Bethel, became, they turned instead to Beth-Avon, the place of wickedness.

There's so many examples of that around our nation. For example, in Aberdeen, the church where Douglas Macmillan once ministered back in the 60s and 70s.

[14 : 10] It was changed into a nightclub back in the 80s. And what did they call it? Instead of being the place of worship, it was called the ministry of sin.

Place of wickedness. Place of just turning away from God. And you see it in so many ways throughout our nation. Places that were once the foundation of our Christian faith are now mocked or turned into other things.

There's a hotel in Peebles down in the borders. and it's an old building. And above the doorway, the words carved into the stone was, prepare to meet thy God.

It was like there was a warning. Warning to the people as they would come, prepare to meet thy God. Not in the sense there was danger, but just that God was real. And so they were to be aware of God and to be ready to meet God.

But now it's just something that's used as a joke as people go in. Something just for a bit of laughter as people go in. The seriousness of being ready to meet God is just taken away from it.

[15 : 24] So Bethel, the place of worship even in our own land, has become Beth-Avon. The place of wickedness. The place of mocking God and turning our back on God.

So, just like Hosea's day, it is a difficult day. So, what can we do in difficult days?

Where do we start? Well, with Hosea, as you see here, it's a day for dedication. It's a day for dedication. It's not a day to forget God or turn away from God.

And as you go through the book of Hosea, it's a challenging book to go through. There's so many images of despair and hopelessness. But in the midst, you find some gems and wisdom and hope. Just like Habakkuk, which we looked through recently when we were thinking of the nuggets of gold that you find in the midst of darkness. Here again in Hosea, we have that same theme as well.

[16 : 28] In the midst of all the difficulties, in the midst of everything that is going wrong in their day, there's still hope. And that's what we have in verse 11 and verse 12.

There is hope. And it's all about turning back to God, dedicating ourselves to Him and continuing to show others the need to turn to God.

So what we have in verse 11 reminds us that the people were made with a purpose. Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh and I have spared her fair name.

But I will put Ephraim to the yoke. Judah must plough. Jacob must harrow for himself. It's a reminder there that we were made to worship God, to serve God.

the trained calf as is mentioned there. That's the illustration for us. We are made for God and to worship God. But we turn away.

[17 : 38] Hosea was faithful. Amos, another prophet, was faithful. Habakkuk, Isaiah, the prophets faithfully proclaiming the good news of the gospel.

But what kind of people did they come up against? Well, we find, just what we find today, a stubborn people. The trained calf as it's mentioned there, the one that the Lord is able to use, is contrasted in chapter 4, verse 16.

There it says, like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn. Can the Lord now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture? the stubborn heifer.

They will not listen. They will not budge. Are we like that sometimes? Are we sometimes the stubborn heifer it's talking about here where we won't budge?

We hold on to things. Yes, we are. And they're all around us too. We've all got that stubborn nature in us. But there are many who, when it comes to hearing the gospel, even just wanting to be close to them in the sense of giving them the gospel, they're stubborn.

[18 : 56] They don't want to hear. And it's hard to keep going in the work when that's what you're coming up against. But yet, we are being reminded in these verses that God has made everyone with a soul.

God has made everyone with a soul that is accountable to God. We are made to worship God. And therefore, we don't lose heart.

We don't lose heart. We keep on knowing that God has his people. Knowing that God is working in his people. And even though as it goes on here to talk about the yoke and the plough and all of these things, it's showing the hard work of delivering the good news of the gospel.

Even into verse 12, break up your fallow ground. It is hard ground. It's a difficult ground to work. We're coming into this season now with March time.

Many people start getting plots ready or fields ready for planting. But if you start on new ground, it's hard. Fallow ground, it's hard to break into.

[20 : 08] It's hard to break down. And it's going to take time to turn that ground into good ground. But there's still that need to plough. There's still that need to work, to break up the fallow ground.

It's not always easy. And that's the image of the vineyard that you see right throughout. We'll see a vineyard that takes time. It takes tending to in order to bear good fruit.

And so it is with the ministry of the gospel. It needs that dedication. It needs that devotion to it.

And that's the kind of people that God calls on us to be as well, to be faithful as we do all for the Lord. And you see it in different ways throughout the scriptures as well.

In different ways we are not to give up, we are not to lose heart. Jesus in Luke 18 he spoke the parable of the woman who kept coming to the master.

[21 : 13] And it's called in verse 1 he says he told them a parable to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart. Always to pray and not lose heart.

To break up the fallow ground. To not give up in our prayers. And to keep on praying. In Psalm 126 which we sang together it says there he goes out weeping carrying seed to sow will return with songs of joy carrying sheaves with him.

So you're going out weeping, you're going out sowing, you're wondering what's going to come. You're maybe feeling a sense of despair and yet the Lord assures there will be a day when you return in song carrying the sheaves the harvest will come.

The Lord can do it. We're reminded even how Jesus himself wept over his people. Luke 19 verse 41 as he approached Jerusalem and saw the city he wept over it and said if you even you had known on this day what would bring you peace but now it is hidden from your eyes.

He was weeping because he had what could bring them peace yet it's hidden and so we are in difficult days but yet it's still a day for dedication a day for devotion to the Lord because we have what can bring peace to the people so we still have hope and so finally in 30 we see here it's a day not to despair it's a day not to despair as chapter 10 verse 12 tells us there is this hope sow for yourselves righteousness reap steadfast love break up your fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord that he may come and rain righteousness upon you one commentator put it this way Hosea is a story heavy with tragedy but buoyant in hope

[23 : 30] I think that's just a great way of putting it heavy with tragedy there's so much that's tragic in the book of Hosea but yet it's buoyant with hope because there is still the hope of the Lord and why why can they hope why could Hosea hope because the Lord because the Lord is with him the Lord is there it is time to seek the Lord the Lord is bringing them down to that point where there's nowhere else to go and again that's the kind of world in which we live a world that as you often see the wheel go round where there's a turning away from God after a time of blessing and we can have everything we do not fear the Lord we don't need a king over us until we come to the point where we're so low we've got nowhere else to go and where do we go then well that's the answer that Hosea has it is time to seek the Lord and we have a day to day where people are looking for these answers and we have the good news to give them it is time to seek the Lord and we should be encouraged that there are things that are happening where the

Lord is working I'm speaking to somebody this week who was speaking about Christian unions and the blessings that they are in schools and we're privileged here to have some of our schools have Christian unions being run in them it's a great delight but we maybe think to ourselves if only they were happening in other places in the mainland they are and in amazing ways there were an update given where schools down in the borders there's just a hunger for the gospel because the young people they know that there's something missing they know the answers aren't coming in the way that we're going and in many ways they're seeking the Lord great opportunities and there is hope because the gospel is always filled with hope we were down in

Manchester a few years ago in a small town south of Manchester and on the Sunday on the Lord's Day we went along to church in the town and we went in got a very warm welcome into the place and there was quite a number in it was a reasonable congregation but as we were looking around we thought there's not many young people here it's mostly a more elderly congregation or middle aged congregation there's one or two young people and one or two infants but as as we sat down the preacher came in one of the first things he said was we're going to be praying today for our youth group who are away for the weekend 80 of them have gone on a trip and I was like we're blown away 80 children and if they'd been there as well the place would have been pretty much full and you're thinking to yourself we didn't expect this we didn't expect this you almost think that the gospel has come out of our nation it hasn't there are many congregations all over the country where the

Lord is working and working in amazing ways so we don't lose hope we don't lose heart and Hosea didn't lose heart he kept devoting himself to proclaiming the word of God now at the beginning we said about his children and what their names meant Jezreel I will scatter my people how he had then a daughter no mercy and then another son not my people but it's actually in these names that you see the hope that he had because if you just turn back to chapter two as we conclude you see there the names mentioned again from verse 20 I will betroth you to my faithfulness and you shall know the Lord and in that day I will answer declares the Lord

I will answer the heavens and they shall answer the earth and the earth shall answer the grain the wine the oil and they shall answer Jezreel and I will sow her for myself in the land so you're seeing with Jezreel that although they were going to be scattered there was going to be a sowing and if

there was a sowing there would be a harvest so the harvest although it was difficult days was promised and then you go on and I will have mercy on no mercy so the Lord is able to show mercy even in the midst of no mercy the Lord is able to show mercy and then he goes on and I will say to not my people you are my people and he shall say you are my God and so you see even in the imagery that was given to

[29 : 12] Hosea of his own family and the misery that there was in it a scattered people a people of no mercy a people who are not my people the Lord says he is able to turn it he is able from the scattering to bring sowing to bring a harvest he is able to have mercy on no mercy he is able to say to you are not my people you are my people and what do the people say you are my God so there is hope the people who say we will have no king over us we do not fear the Lord there is the hope that they will return and say you are my God so Hosea breaks the fallow ground for it is time to seek the Lord and so that as we do likewise as we seek to proclaim the good news of the gospel we do so in light of that it is time to seek the Lord the Lord who is able to bear a great harvest the Lord who is able to show mercy and the Lord who is able to turn a people who are not his people into a people who are his people that they would say with one voice my Lord and my

God we have difficult days it's days for dedication and devotion and it's a day that we will see the delight as we see God working there is good news for all so we are to keep proclaiming that good news in the hope of God hearing and answering our prayers well let us pray Lord our gracious God we do thank you for your word that fills us with that hope that in the midst of the heaviness of tragedy as that commentator put it that we see that too that it was filled and buoyant with hope and we thank you Lord that that encourages in our day too that we would see a world that is so full of tragedy in so many different ways but yet that we would see the hope that there is in seeking the Lord we ask

Lord that you will bless us in every endeavour to show forth that good news to show it to all around us to be a people who do not lose heart in doing so even though there are difficulties Lord that we would be filled with that dedication to you and that we would see Lord a delight in you that we would see a people coming to rejoice in the hope that there is in Jesus so we ask all these things Lord confessing our need of you confessing our shortcomings and our sins but thankful for the one who is on our side our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as we pray in his name Amen we voy voy voy