Hosea 6:11b-7:16

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Preacher: Greg Hendrickson

[0:00] Would you turn with me in your Bibles to Hosea chapter 7? If you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, it's found on page 754. Looking at Hosea chapter 7 today, we'll actually begin reading with the last half of chapter 6, verse 11.

Just a brief note on why we're doing that. Ancient Hebrew didn't have punctuation marks, so different English translations of the Bible sometimes divide the sentences at different points. Sometimes the ESV, what we're using here, divides it between verse 11 and chapter 7, but the NIV, the RSV, some other translations start halfway through verse 11, and as we studied this passage among the pastors, we felt that the thought begins actually in the second half of verse 11.
So it doesn't greatly affect the meaning either way, but that's why we're doing it the way we are. So Hosea chapter 7, starting again with the second half of verse 11.
When I restore the fortunes of my people, when I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed and the evil deeds of Samaria.
For they deal falsely. The thief breaks in and the bandits raid outside. But they do not consider that I remember all their evil. Now their deeds surround them.
[1:22] They are before my face by their evil. They make the king glad, and the princes by their treachery. They are all adulterers. They are like a heated oven whose baker ceases to stir the fire from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened.

On the day of our king, the princes become sick with the heat of wine. He stretched out his hand with mockers. For with hearts like an oven, they approach their intrigue. All night their anger smolders.
In the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me. Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples.
Ephraim is a cake not turned. Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not. Gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not. The pride of Israel testifies to his face.
Yet they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this. Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria.
[2:24] As they go, I will spread over them my net. I will bring them down like birds of the heavens. I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation. Woe to them, for they have strayed from me.

Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me. I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me. They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds.
For grain and wine they gash themselves. They rebel against me. Although I trained and strengthened their arms, yet they devise evil against me. They return, but not upward.
They are like a treacherous bow. Their princes shall fall by the sword because of the insolence of their tongue. This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt. Let's pray.
Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Test us and know our thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in us.
[3:29] And lead us in the way everlasting. In Jesus' name, amen. Well, the story goes that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes mystery novels, detective stories, once sent the same telegram to a dozen prominent British citizens.

The telegram read, Flee at once. All is discovered. All 12 men packed up and left town immediately. Now, to be honest, examining the historical evidence is not sure, it's not certain whether this event actually happened.

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Though Sir Arthur Conan Doyle certainly liked to tell the story with great relish. And a similar story appears in one of his novels, The Adventures of the Glorious Scott. On this side of the pond, Mark Twain, the American author, told a similar story as well.
Well, Hosea 7 presents us with a very similar message. Except it's a message directly from God. All is discovered.
Nothing is hidden anymore. Because it's a message from God, there's nowhere to flee. Verse 2, God says, I remember all your evil.
[4:48] Your evil deeds surround you. They're like a besieging army. They're right in front of my face, crying out for righteous judgment. In this chapter, Hosea shines the spotlight on the people's evil.

And he brings forth four vivid images to make his point. He says they're like a blazing hot oven. They're like an inedible cake or loaf of bread.
They're like a senseless dove. Finally, he says, they're like a treacherous bow. As we look at each of these images, we'll see three things today.
We'll see first the reality of evil. Second, we'll see three vain attempts that we make to escape from this reality. And third, we'll see one way to face the reality of evil without being destroyed by it.
Now, before we delve in, let me give a little brief background to Hosea. This fall, we're preaching through the entire book of Hosea. And for many of us, this is a new experience because in my experience, at least, not many churches preach through the entire book of Hosea or most of the other minor prophets in the Old Testament.
[6:04] And if you're visiting today, you might wonder, why in the world are they reading and preaching through a book like this? Well, for one thing, we want to preach through every chapter in the book of Hosea because we believe that every chapter in the book of Hosea was inspired by God himself and is useful for teaching, correcting, rebuking, and training God's people in righteousness.

And as we delve into what is for many of us an unfamiliar part of the Bible, perhaps a difficult part, yet we find that it faithfully reveals God's character and God's purposes, we can grow in our confidence that all of Scripture, even the parts that at first seem unfamiliar or hard, all of Scripture is inspired by God and useful for our good.
Now, more specifically, the elders at Trinity chose Hosea at this time for our church because it exposes in such a vivid way both the depth of our sinfulness and our need for God and the depth of God's redeeming, steadfast, faithful love.
And if we truly grasp those two realities, the depth of our sinfulness and our need for God and the depth of God's redeeming and steadfast love for us will become a people who are truly humble and dependent on God and at the same time a people who are secure and confident in God.
And that's what we want to be as a church, a people who are humble and dependent and a people who are secure and confident, all because of the message of God's grace.
[7:45] Now who was Hosea? Hosea lived in the 8th century BC. He prophesied primarily in the northern kingdom after the kingdom of Israel had split into two.

This northern kingdom is also called Ephraim in this chapter several times after its largest tribe. Now the historical background to Hosea's ministry is found in 2 Kings 14-17.
So if you're here every week and you're looking through Hosea, you might find it helpful to read those chapters at some point this fall. 2 Kings 14-17. Now basically, when Hosea began his ministry around 755 BC, the northern kingdom was enjoying a time of peace and prosperity under King Jeroboam II.
But it was also a time of moral corruption and spiritual compromise. And throughout Hosea's lifetime, the northern kingdom started having a time of peace and prosperity, but quickly it went downhill.
And by the end of Hosea's lifetime, or toward the end of Hosea's ministry in 722 BC, the northern kingdom was conquered by Assyria. And it ended.
[8:53] Now chapter 7 was probably written somewhere in the middle of this downhill slide. Things had gotten bad, but they were going to get worse. Now verses 3-7, Hosea begins by portraying the reality of evil.

And this is his first metaphor. The image or metaphor of a blazing hot oven. Verse 4, They're like a heated oven whose baker ceases to stir the fire. Now normally, if you stop taking care of a fire, if

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you stop stirring a fire, the fire just gradually dies out.
But in this case, the fire only gets hotter and hotter. It's like a self-propagating wildfire, continually consuming more and more. Verse 6, With hearts like an oven, they approach their intrigue.
All night their anger smolders. In the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are hot as an oven and they devour their rulers. Their envy, their burning envy and their lust for power spurred on by drunken mocking ends with them consuming their leaders.
So this section begins in verse 3 with royal joy by their evil. They make the king glad. And it ends in royal collapse. All their kings have fallen.
[10:09] Verse 7. Now in the historical context, Hosea was almost surely referring to the period after the death of Jeroboam II. And it was a period of political instability marked by assassinations and military coups and conspiracies and violence.

Out of the last six kings of Israel, four were assassinated and the last one was exiled. The northern kingdom was a blazing oven. It was out of control. In the end, it only consumed itself.
That's Hosea's description of the consuming reality of evil. Now you might be thinking, well, okay, that's perhaps an apt description of Hosea's historical context or maybe even some other part of the world today.
But that's not what most of us are like. Oh, yes, we all make mistakes. Nobody's perfect. But I'm not part of any assassination plots. Most of us have basically good intentions, even if we fall short some of the time.
Well, of course, evil isn't so far away when you pick up the New Haven Register or see it in the boxes on Thursday morning and see a front page story about an 18-month-old kid who was shot on his front porch here in New Haven.
[11:25] We might think, surely, this is a twisted world that we live in where such a thing could happen. But still, many of us distance ourselves from such evils.

Well, whoever did that may be evil, but I am not like them. But you know, Hosea's description of evil is not limited to his historical context.
It's not limited to senseless acts of violence. In the context of the Bible as a whole, Hosea 7, is a very particular description, but it reflects the human condition in which all of us share.
You see, according to the Bible, our evil deeds may differ in degree, but they don't differ in kind. Our circumstances may be different, the consequences and effects of our evil may vary, but at its core, evil proceeds from the passions and desires of the human heart.
Things like envy or greed or anger, lust for power, longing for security. Now, desires in themselves aren't necessarily evil.
[12:37] God didn't make us robots or computers motivated purely by calculation. He made us to be motivated by our desires and affections. He made us to love and desire Him above all else.

He also gave us desires for food, for sex, for meaningful work, for relationships, for justice and beauty. The problem is that our desires, even our desires for good things, so easily become blazing fires, raging out of control, never satisfied, always needing more, and eventually consuming ourselves and the people around us.
Now, what might this look like? What does this look like? Well, basically, we do things that we don't really want to do. Perhaps our desire for comfort and security leads us to turn to food.
And we begin to eat, not because we're hungry, but because we're anxious or lonely or stressed.
And even when no one else is around to comfort us, we can always eat in order to feel better.
But then our idolatrous attachment to food begins to consume us. Our wants turn into needs. And our minds are filled with thoughts of food throughout the day. It becomes a consuming passion, but when we overeat, we feel guilty and then become irritable.
[13:54] And then food becomes our enemy because it makes us fat. And so we hate it and can no longer receive it as a good gift from God. And we go back and forth doing all kinds of things that we don't really want to be doing.

Or we find ourselves saying things that we know we shouldn't say. You know, if we feel criticized, we respond by saying hurtful things, even to the people that we love most.
Even when we're in the middle of saying things, we realize that we don't even really believe all that we're saying because we're speaking out of our anger, out of our desires, raging out of control.
In the New Testament, the Apostle James uses the image, the same image of a blazing fire to describe not physical acts of violence but hurtful words. He says, how great a forest is set ablaze by

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a small fire and the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.
Every kind of beast and bird can be tamed but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison. Words spoken in anger can destroy friendships.
[15:06] Gossip, shared in secret, can undermine a community. Lies and half-truths can damage someone's reputation. The tongue is a fire.

But you know, it's not only that we do things that we don't really want to do, we also don't do the things that we really should do. Our misdirected desires consume us so that we lack the time and energy and focus to invest in the things that we really should.
We can even be consumed by apparently good things. You know, if you're married like I am with children, it's possible to spend nearly all your time and energy on your kids and leave only remnants of time and affection and initiative for your spouse.
And then when the kids finally grow up and leave home, you realize that your marriage has become hollow and distant and joyless. Or a desire for meaningful work, a good desire can take over to the point where our job is really what matters above all else.
And anything that might possibly hinder our work performance or our career advancement is seen as a threat. Hosea exposes the reality of evil, evil desires in the human heart, our misdirected and idolatrous desires that become an all-consuming fire.
[16:31] But then Hosea also shows us three futile ways, three ways that we vainly try to escape from this reality. Now the first way that we respond is in verses 8 through 10.

It's pride. And he uses this image of a cake not turned. And what exactly does that mean? Well perhaps the image is of a flat loaf of bread that's burnt on one side and gooey on the other.
Or perhaps it refers to a loaf that's not properly kneaded or folded over. There are impure ingredients in the mix and so it lacks cohesiveness and strength. It crumbles and falls apart like a really bad gluten-free muffin if you know what I'm talking about.
Either way the point is clear. It's completely inedible. The northern kingdom had compromised by mixing itself with the surrounding peoples.
In other words by adopting the pagan religious practices and moral practices of the surrounding nations. And as a result of their compromise Hosea says they're growing old perhaps even growing mold.
[17:36] The gray hairs could be an image of mold forming on the bread. And the irony is that they're blind. They don't realize that this is what's happening to them. They don't realize that they're being eaten up.

That they're crumbling. Their pride blinded them to the dire reality of their situation. Verse 10 says their pride. The pride of Israel testifies to his face and it blinds them.
And perhaps it was their national pride. Not long ago their king Jeroboam II had restored had expanded their borders and restored the political greatness of the northern kingdom as far as it ever had been.
Perhaps it was their religious pride. They believe that nothing really bad can ever happen to us because we're God's special people. And because of our religious heritage we're not prone to the same problems as other nations.
Or perhaps it was simply stubborn independence. In his perceptive commentary Derek Kidner wrote on this passage he said in this case Israel is a victim of the surrounding nations but Israel is a victim who would rather not be helped.
[18:50] You see our pride can blind us to the reality of evil in our hearts. it's like seeing little brown pellets on the floor of your basement and then refusing to ever turn on the light when you go down there for fear that you might see a mouse.

Or it's like living in an apartment building where there has been bed bugs next door and across the hall and thinking but there's no way that they could ever come into my apartment.
Proverbs 16 18 says pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall and in the New Testament in Revelation chapter 3 God brings a similar warning to the Christian church in Laodicea and he says I know your works you're neither cold nor hot you're lukewarm because you're lukewarm I'll spit you out of my mouth for you say I'm rich I've prospered I don't need anything not realizing that you're wretched pitiable poor blind and naked see pride can make us blind to our need for God and Hosea says that's a futile response but then he gives another futile response in verses 11 through 13 and this this is the second futile response is anxious activity the image of a fluttering

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dove Ephraim is like a dove silly or easily deceived and without sense calling to
Egypt going to Assyria now like the oven that even though it wasn't stoked it never cooled off this is another unexpected use of imagery normally the dove is an image of peace in the bible it's even an image of the holy spirit sometimes but here it's an image of frantic activity anxiously fluttering back and forth one direction and another with no consistent sense of direction now in the historical context Hosea was criticizing the vacillating and inconsistent foreign policy of the Israelite kings first king Menahem agreed to pray tribute to the king of Assyria Assyria was sort of the reigning superpower King Menahem agreed to pray tribute to them so that they would say off say away and not bother them then two kings later king Pekah made an alliance with Syria different nation instead which provoked Assyria to attack and take many cities in the northern kingdom the next king Hosea renewed the tribute payments to Assyria but then he stopped and he sent messengers down to Egypt instead hoping to make an alliance to get their protection the king of Assyria found out and invaded the land Egypt offered no help at all and that's how the northern kingdom ended you know you didn't have to be a prophet receiving divine inspiration to realize that Israel's foreign policy was foolish and senseless it wasn't even consistent with itself let alone consistent with God's commands the kings anxiously fluttered back and forth desperately trying to make deals and then going back just as quickly on the deal that they had just made of course no one wanted to protect them they'd already been disloyal to God and so they ended up being disloyal to everyone else too well what might this look like in our context in our lives well it might look like when our decisions and activities are motivated by anxiety guilt and fear of what other people will think instead of by faith hope and love in God or it might look like when we're tempted to break a promise that we've made or go back on our word that we've given to someone because a better opportunity for us has just appeared now if we're tempted to go back on a commitment that we've made to another person does that indicate that like the
[22:55] Israelites in our hearts we've already taken a step back from our commitment to love and trust God above everything else Jesus said let your yes be yes and your no be no and leave the rest in God's hands or when we're restless it can also look like when we're fluttering back and forth always seeking something new a new hobby a new relationship a new job instead of finding contentment in the situation where God has put us for this season of our lives so Hosea says pride induced blindness anxiety driven activity both of these are futile attempts to escape the evil in our hearts but when our pride is crushed when our anxious activity is revealed to be futile sometimes we turn to the third response verse 14 through 16 despairing frustration the image of a treacherous bow verse 14 says they don't cry to me from their heart but they wail upon their beds a little bit like a child who throws a temper tantrum in a futile attempt to get his own way for grain and wine they gash themselves they rebel against me perhaps

Hosea was referring to the worship of Baal where some people even slash themselves in order to provoke Baal the god Baal to look upon them favorably but whatever the historical reference the point is clear they'd rather destroy themselves than humble themselves before god they turn their frustration and anguish inward you know it's always very sad to see or know someone who maybe has been harmed very much by other people and yet they perpetuate that cycle by turning it inward and harming themselves it's the image of a treacherous bow the weapon that fails to protect not only fails to protect from oncoming enemies but also is a potential harm to its very user same image is found in psalm 78 56 and 57 where it says they rebelled against the most high god and they did not keep his testimonies but turned away and acted treacherously they twisted like a deceitful bow we see in all these futile attempts to escape the consequences of their evil they failed to do the one thing that could actually help if you look through the passage verse 7 it says none of them calls upon me verse 10 says they don't return to the lord their god or seek him even for all this verse 13 they've strayed from me they've rebelled against me they speak lies against me verse 14 they don't cry to me from the heart and finally verse 15 although I trained and strengthened their arms they devised evil against me we've seen
Hosea's four images of evil and corruption and our response to those things but verse 15 he gives us another image he gives us a glimpse of a father training his son to walk strengthening his arms perhaps even teaching him how to use a bow see the god whom we see in Hosea and the god whom we see in the bible is not only a righteous judge who has every right to punish us for our evil he's also a compassionate father whose heart burns with love and anguish for his wayward and rebellious and lost children he longs for them to come home and be healed from their wandering

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maybe you're a parent you're longing for your wayward and rebellious child to come home you can understand a little bit of the heart of God who waits and longs for his children to come home but you know
God doesn't only wait and long for them to come home in Jesus Christ he has come to us to pursue us with relentless costly redeeming love a love which ultimately led him to take our evil and all its consequences on himself when he died on the cross so that he could destroy our evil without destroying us Hosea 7 is a dark chapter ending with woes pronouncements of exile and falling by the sword but even here we see glimmers of hope shafts of light that reach even the darkest part of this tunnel in the beginning of the chapter when God speaks of his desire or perhaps it's even a promise to one day restore the fortunes of my people to heal Israel and again in verse 13 where he says I would redeem them just as he had redeemed them from slavery in the past he promises through Hosea that one day he would come and heal and restore them once again and that's what he came to do in Jesus
Christ earlier we read from Revelation a passage warning of the dire consequences of pride but that same passage concludes with an invitation from Jesus himself Revelation 320 he says behold I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come into him and eat with him and he with me the invitation is to come and lay down your pride and stop your anxious fluttering and refrain from further harming yourself instead look outside of yourself listen to the voice of Jesus who stands at the door open the door and let him come in about seven years ago I was talking to someone who had come to church for the first time and he said to me you know
[29:28] I've tried just about everything for a while I had a good life I had a car I had a job I had a family but I was empty and I turned to alcohol I was alcoholic for many years now I've become homeless and depressed the only thing I haven't really tried is God so I'm ready to try God well this man still comes to this church you probably wouldn't recognize who he is because his life has changed so much but he would say don't wait until you've tried everything else and come up empty before you turn to God turn to Jesus today and receive healing and restoration in him we've seen God's message through Hosea flee at once all is discovered but where can you flee you can't flee from God you can't run away from God wherever you try to go he will be there he is everywhere he is light and in him there is no darkness at all he sees all your evil even the evil that you don't recognize in your own heart you can only flee to him flee to him for he is he has come to bring you home come to the cross of Jesus and find refuge and forgiveness and healing there if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in the darkness we lie and do not practice the truth but if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of

Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin come into the light today whether it's for the first time or the thousandth time confess your sin to the Lord come clean with him about whatever is in your heart and receive again his promise of forgiveness in Jesus Christ if we confess our sins God is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness because Jesus Christ has become the atoning sacrifice for our sins flee to him and you will find amazing grace greater than all your evil let us pray God we thank you for your word to us for hard word exposing the evil in our hearts and yet
Lord is the word of your love and your desire to heal and restore and redeem us and we thank you for sending Jesus Christ to pay the price for all of our sin that we might be forgiven and that we might go free and that we might have life in you Lord we pray that we would cling on to him pray this in Jesus name amen well this morning we have the joy of celebrating baptism together we baptize in Karen Ward before before Karen comes to the front let me say a few words about baptism at some point the music actually the musicians can feel free to come forward at this point and prepare while I speak a few words you

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