

Hosea 14

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[0 : 00] Good morning, church. It's good to see you this morning. We are going to conclude our series in the book of Hosea this morning. Would you turn with me to Hosea chapter 14?

The page number is in your pew Bible if you want to turn there. The page number is in your bulletin if you want to turn there in the pew Bible. Wrapping up our series in this great book of Hosea. Let me read this passage for us.

Hosea 14. 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.

[1 : 05] 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 a lily. He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon. His shoots shall spread out. His beauty shall be like the olive and his fragrance like Lebanon.

They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow. They shall flourish like the grain. They shall blossom like the vine. Their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress. From me comes your fruit.

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things. Whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right and the upright walk in them.

[2 : 08] But transgressors stumble in them. Let's pray. Amen. God, as we come to the end of the message that you have for us in the book of Hosea, Lord, we ask that once again you would speak to us through this book.

Lord, that you would show us more of your holiness, more of our sinfulness, and more of your love for us. God, would you soften our hearts to hear what the Spirit, your Spirit, is saying to us.

Jesus, would we get a fresh glimpse of your majesty and your mercy. And would you draw our hearts near to you in true worship this morning as we behold you in your word.

Lord, we pray this in the name of Christ. Amen. So here it is. Here is the conclusion of Hosea's message. Hosea 14 is a call to repentance and a promise of renewal.

A promise of renewal. And the message for us today is simple, yet completely profound. We might sum it up like this. Every sinner who genuinely repents, the Lord will freely love.

[3 : 27] Isn't that good news? And those he freely loves, he will cause to flourish. And that flourishing looks like abounding in spiritual beauty and stability and fruitfulness, as we'll come to see in verses 5 through 7.

We'll take a look at that more closely in just a minute. But consider the opening four verses, where we see this great truth that every sinner who genuinely repents, the Lord will freely love.

The end of verse 3 summarizes it pretty well, I think. In you, the orphan finds mercy. You have to realize that in the ancient world, orphans had no rights and no status and no claims.

To be without a father, to be without a family, to be without those kinds of connections was to be destitute and hopeless, practically. And with no family and no inheritance and no protection, they were the ones perhaps most excluded from the potential or the promise of real flourishing.

But as Hosea tells us, when empty-handed orphans come to God, they find mercy. And not just mercy, but adoption.

[4 : 46] They're made his children. We see that alluded to in verse 1, where it says, Return to the Lord your God. Now, if you've been with us in this series in Hosea the last number of weeks, you

know that God has had some pretty powerful words of judgment for his people.

That they've turned away from him and his judgment comes. But in light of all that, God says, I'm still your God. He approaches them with the intimate, covenantal language of God with his people. The Lord your God. Hosea is telling us that self-professed spiritual orphans who turn to God are made his full-fledged sons and daughters.

Those with no rights are granted all the rights and privileges of a child of the king. And those with no claim are given free and intimate access to God as their father. And those with no status and nothing to commend them in the world are called children of God.

Now, that's an incredible promise. But you see, this has been the deep undercurrent of Hosea's message the whole time, hasn't it?

[6:03] Sin has wrecked our relationship with God, but somehow God will overcome our sin.

Remember chapter 1, verse 10? In the place where it was said to them, you are not my people, it shall be said to them, children of the living God.

There it is. Orphans finding mercy. Adopted as children. We see it again in chapter 2, verse 23. God says, I will have mercy on no mercy.

And I will say to not my people, you are my people. And he shall say, you are my God. Again, there it is. Every sinner who genuinely repents, the Lord will freely love and cause to flourish.

None will be cast out. God takes these self-acknowledged spiritual orphans and makes them his full-fledged, freely loved daughters and sons.

But the passage gets even more stunning than that as we kind of roll through it. If you can imagine, there's even more. Because as chapter 14 continues, in verses 5 through 7, all those sort of agricultural metaphors that we read, God talks about how he's going to love those who return.

[7:16] And what's very interesting is that some commentators see these verses, verses 5 through 7, as reminiscent of Hebrew love poetry. Like the Song of Solomon.

In fact, if you were to go and read through the Song of Solomon, you would see all sorts of connections to these few verses. In other words, the second half of this chapter, we find not the words of a father, but the words of a lover.

Of course, we don't write love poetry like that anymore, do we? Guys, don't tell your girlfriend that she's as beautiful as an olive and smells like Lebanon.

That's probably not going to win you any points. Baby, you smell like a tree. Rethink that one. But you know, if these commentators are right, if these verses are alluding to ancient love poetry, then what we have in Hosea 14 as a whole is this wildly mixed metaphor.

Hosea is telling us that we come as orphans, and God makes us not just children, but as bride. A mixed metaphor, but a beautiful one.

[8:29] And one that's actually fitting with the whole of Hosea's message, isn't it? After all, this is the prophet whom God told to go marry a prostitute. And when she ran away to other lovers and ended up enslaved, God told Hosea, go again and love that woman who's loved by another man and is an adulteress.

Even as the Lord loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods. That's the message of Hosea, friends. That the harlot becomes the bride because of God's unflinching love.

The orphan becomes the heir. And as verse 4 tells us, that's a love that flows freely.

I will love them freely, God says. Not begrudgingly. Not because he's constrained to do so by some sense of cold duty. He doesn't bring them back as second-class citizens, but he loves them freely and willingly and gladly.

Remember the prodigal son coming home in Jesus' parable? He says, Father, I'm not worthy to be called your son. Just make me like one of your servants. Let me earn my keep.

[9:45] And what does the father do? He lavishes on him the robe and the ring and the shoes, and he embraces him. Freely loved.

But you have to also see that it's a costly love. Remember Hosea, when he went and ransomed his wife from slavery, he had to pay 15 shekels of silver and a whole bunch of bushels of grain.

Which some commentators think that since he had to sort of scrape together money and food, that that might have been every last penny this poor prophet had to go get his wife back.

And that's a picture. It's telling us that the Lord's love is also a costly love. That he too pays a price to make us his heir and his bride.

So the first part of our passage is telling us that this is how we have to come to God. Have you been wondering what to do these weeks as we've heard about God's love and about God's holiness? [10:59] What are we to do? And Hosea says, here's what you do. Come. And you come as self-acknowledged orphans, wholly dependent on God's grace.

This is what you have to realize, Hosea is saying, that spiritually speaking, because of our sin, we have no rights and no status and no claims on the love of God. There's an old hymn that says, nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling.

We've quoted that often before when we talk about these things. But you see, that's genuine repentance at its core. To come to God solely on the basis of his grace, with no pretensions and no desserts and no rights.

Nothing in my hands I bring. Of course, these verses teaches us more about what true repentance is. On the one hand, it involves admitting our sin and asking God to forgive it, take away all iniquity, verse 2 says.

On the other hand, it involves humbly committing ourselves to worship God rightly. That's what the last part of verse 2 is all about, if you were wondering about that when we read it. When it says, we'll pay with bulls the vows of our lips, it's a picture of Old Testament worship.

[12:16] And of course, that's not how we worship God today under the New Covenant, but the principle is the same. Instead of making empty promises and presuming on God's favor, we humbly say to God, Lord, accept what is good.

And I commit to worshiping you as you prescribe. Here's my life. But verse 3 goes on to show us that genuine repentance isn't just about confessing our sins generally for forgiveness and committing our hearts generally to God, although that's the basic pattern.

Verse 3 shows us that genuine repentance is also very heart-piercingly specific. For Hosea's audience, this meant renouncing their trust in the political alliances with Assyria, renouncing their trust in the military power of their war horses, and renouncing their wooden idols, the work of their hands.

Of course, for us, the kingdom of Assyria is long gone, so I don't think anyone's making a political alliance there. And no one's thinking that war horses are the key to successful statecraft.

Didn't President Obama have something to say about that in one of these debates? And few of us are actually carving wooden idols, aren't we? But you see, the principle's the same. We have to identify these functional saviors in our life and admit that they will not and they cannot save us.

[13:42] For ancient Israel, it was a political alliance. What is it for you? Perhaps you consider yourself a pretty open-minded and tolerant person. You're not judgmental or self-righteous.

You wish all people well and you help people when you can. And friends, let me tell you this morning, that's a good thing. It's good to have an open mind. And it's good to care for others. Oh, that more people would think that way.

But the reality is, is it won't save you. It won't reconcile you to God. In fact, there's a deep irony. In fact, the more and more you look to your open-mindedness as what recommends you before God or what sets you apart from other people or what makes you a sort of worthy person, the more you actually start to look down on those people who aren't so open-minded and tolerant.

In fact, you'll start to despise them a little bit in your heart. You'll care for and tolerate everyone except for those who are uncaring and intolerant. And ironically, you'll become the very thing you thought you weren't.

You'll become judgmental and critical to certain kinds of people, that is, those who aren't tolerant or as accepting as you are. And you'll be unloving and uncaring.

[14:57] So you see, not even that, that sort of great virtue of our day can save us. And if we make it into our God, it will actually destroy us. Not even that can save us.

This genuine repentance before God is actually admitting that nothing will. So as we've said, genuine repentance is an appeal solely to God's mercy as a self-professed spiritual and moral orphan.

Of course, it's hard to admit you're an orphan, spiritually speaking, that you have nothing good to recommend you to God. An old theologian used to say, the only thing you need is nothing, but that's the one thing we don't have.

Nothing doesn't come naturally to us. We want to have some part to play in saving ourselves. We want to get at least some credit for our salvation.

Every other religion in the world will show you some work or some act to perform. But Hosea says here that if you're going to genuinely come to God, it's got to be on the basis of grace alone.

[16:10] The only thing you need is nothing. Nothing in my hands I bring. Simply to the cross I cling. And yet God isn't doing this as a way to belittle us or make it difficult.

The only thing you need is nothing, and nothing is the one thing that you don't have. It's kind of cruel of God to ask for nothing then, isn't it? But no. You see, God is so eager and so willing for us to return that he even gives us the very words to do it.

How tender these verses are. Come home, Israel. Here are the words to take with you. It's like a parent who teaches her child to write by holding her child's hand and then guiding the pencil across the page.

Here's an example of the words to say. And of course, words can end up being mere talk, can't they? But words are also the expression of our hearts. And after all, it's a relationship that God wants with his people, a devoted and exclusive and heartfelt relationship that's passionate and that's zealous.

No other book in the Old Testament is as explicit in telling us just that than the book of Hosea. And like any relationship, it's built on words spoken from the heart.

[17:31] So this morning, friend, would you return to God? Speak to him. Go to him with words. And what words should you use?

Hosea tells us. Tell him your sins and ask for forgiveness. Commit yourself to worship him. Be specific in your confession. And above all, call on his mercy.

His mercy shown to you in his son, Jesus. And the promise is that he will extend it to you. The Apostle John puts it this way. In light of what Jesus has done, he says, If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves.

And the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Of course, as we said, it's hard to admit we're orphans, isn't it?

It's hard to admit that we have nothing to bring. And so the Lord shows us. The Lord shows us what he's going to do with everyone who returns.

[18:40] This is his promise for everyone who will come and genuinely return. Verses 4 through 7. We see that the Lord promises to make everyone who returns beautiful and stable and fruitful.

Let's look at each one of those in turn. Consider first the beauty that God promises to all who return. God says, I'll be like the dew to Israel and he shall blossom like the lily. His beauty shall be like the olive and his fragrance like Lebanon.

Their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. To repent and return to God is to become as beautiful as a flower in bloom, God says. Of course, we don't think about repentance as bringing forth beauty.

Repentance is kind of an ugly word in our culture, isn't it? But here, Hosea is showing us that we need to remember what repentance is. Repentance is admitting you're an orphan and becoming God's bride.

That's the beauty of a Christian. It's the loveliness of those who know they are loved. Those who know that the King of Heaven finds them ravishing, even though they've done nothing to deserve it.

[19:50] Ephesians 5 tells us that Christ looks upon his church and sees his bride clothed in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing. And that will produce a beauty in you like none other.

Think of how this works corporately. There are ugly churches, aren't there? Not just buildings. Ugly churches as people.

You know what I mean. Churches full of bitterness and gossip. Churches that are ingrown and full of a judgmental spirit. Maybe some of you have sort of been on the receiving end of some ugly churches.

But why are they so ugly? Why the bitterness and the gossip and the judgmentalism? Where does it spring from? It spring from hearts that haven't been softened by the grace of God.

From hearts that haven't been touched by genuine repentance. But if you know that God has taken you as an orphan and has made you his bride, then you'll be beautiful.

[21:02] Because for starters, the one who's been forgiven much will love much, as Jesus teaches. There will be a kindness and a hospitable nature and a forgiving spirit and an openness to

outsiders.

You see, when you realize that grace, the hardness starts to melt and the armor of your self-protection will start to loosen and the need to gossip and hold grudges starts to fall off. And then you start to blossom like the lily. And you start to look a lot like the one who came to rescue us, full of love.

And joy. And peace. And patience. And kindness. And godness. And faithfulness. And gentleness. And self-control. God promises spiritual beauty for all who return.

Friends, are you longing for that kind of beauty? For the kind of beauty that's deeper than what we see on the surface? The kind of beauty that's a character that shines.

[22 : 13] Hosea is saying, return to him and he'll make you beautiful. But God also promises stability to all who return. Look at verse 5.

God says that they'll take root like the trees of Lebanon. If you know that God has taken you as an orphan and made you his bride, then you'll be as stable as a tree with roots that are dug down deep.

The trees of Lebanon in the ancient world were renowned. They were massive. In fact, if you Wikipedia, you can find some images of them, I bet. And they must have had these massive roots to bear them up.

And Hosea is saying, it's like all that. It's like that for all who return to the Lord. Think about it this way. How do you respond when you receive criticism? Are you touchy?

Or dismissive? Or a little crushed? If your co-worker has a critical comment about your work, are you shaken by it the rest of the day? Of course, no one likes to take criticism, but does it set you off balance for the rest of the week?

[23 : 17] Do you suddenly become critical of others too? Friends, wouldn't that change if you knew that God has received you as an orphan and made you his bride?

What criticism could really shake you if you had God's undeserved love freely given to you? If you had the only opinion that really matters spoken over you?

And Hosea says that that begins to grow like a deep and strong network of roots to make you strong and stable. And not just in the face of criticism, but in the face of suffering and hardships. You know, when all is stripped away, Hosea is saying you have a taproot that runs down to the very source of life and it can't be shaken. And if it's true in hardship and suffering, then it's true in the face of persecution as well.

Jesus is quite frank of the fact that following him will bring reproach from the world. As much as following him will bring unmistakable beauty to your life, beauty that even non-Christians will find compelling and attractive, Jesus says there also will come opposition.

[24 : 31] But for those who've experienced genuine repentance, the orphans who've been made into brides, even persecution can't uproot them. In fact, it makes them stronger.

It's hard for us in the West to imagine that. But our brothers and sisters in the worldwide church know at first hand that not even persecution or famine or sword can keep us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

So as you think about criticism or suffering or persecution, are you blown and tossed? Are you longing to be settled and secure?

Then return to the Lord and he will give you a stability like nothing else, like a tree with the roots that are dug down deep. Third, God promises fruitfulness to all those who return.

God says in verse 6, his shoots shall spread out. And then he says in verse 7, they'll flourish like the grain and they'll blossom like the vine. In other words, if you know that God has taken you as an orphan and made you his bride, then you'll be fruitful.

[25 : 45] There will be an expansive overflow in your life and it will be as plentiful and life-giving as a field and harvest. The branches will start stretching out toward your neighbors and into your work and through your campus and your community.

Friends, imagine our entire city flourishing when the children of God, the bride of Christ, start spreading out their branches and flourishing like the grain.

It's fascinating that three times in this passage God mentions Lebanon. As I mentioned, Lebanon was renowned for its great forests of cedar and cypress. But isn't it fascinating that God chooses the glory of a Gentile nation to represent what his people will look like in full bloom?

Is it too much of a stretch to see a hint of the New Testament church here? The Jew plus Gentile people of God gathered around their King, Jesus? The fullness of Him who fills all in all, as Paul says in Ephesians?

Friends, this much is true that as the church begins to spread its branches in a city, it will start to bring about the reconciliation of groups that no one thought possible. And isn't that one of the great questions of our day?

[27 : 05] How do we bring about reconciliation and harmony in our fractured and stratified society? And the answer is found in the gospel. That in Jesus Christ, spiritual orphans are made God's beloved bride.

And you see, if that's the case, then no culture and no class and no gender has an advantage or a special privilege before God. All are in need of a Savior and all are equally welcome to come and to be made heirs and to be made as bride.

And if we really believe that, could racism continue to exist among the truly repentant? Would classism continue to exist?

Would we keep judging one another based on where we went to school or where we grew up or how much money we make or what jobs we have? As the people of God get a deeper grasp of God's grace, these things just start to lose their grip.

But you see, that's just part of the expanding influence and fruitfulness of the church. Friends, this morning, ask yourself, where is God leading me to spread out my branches? Where has God placed me to be salt and light, to be a part of that growing, flourishing harvest as God describes his people?

[28 : 26] Do you see your work as an avenue to serve others, as a place to glorify God, as a place to spread out the branches of grace and renewal?

You know, when God created humanity, he created them to keep and cultivate a garden, to be culture makers. Do you see your work in that way as a way to serve, as a way to develop, as a way to grow, as a way to bless?

And what about your neighbors? Do you see your neighbors as the people God has providentially brought into your life so that you might love them and serve them? Just think, of the roughly 800,000 people who live in the New Haven area, you know, of the roughly what, 5,000 undergraduates at Yale or the 10,000 students at Quinnipiac, et cetera, et cetera, of all those people, God has chosen that handful of people for you to love and serve.

Of all those people, those are the ones God put in your life. He knew that you would be just the right ones to love them and to serve them and to pray for them and then to invite them to the carol service.

Kidding, that's kind of a joke. Are you still awake? It's not a bad idea. There's flyers in the back. But friends, do you stop and think?

[29 : 56] Of the million people you could live next to, those are the ones God's put in your life. Don't be afraid to take some risks. You were once orphans and now you're his bride.

Have confidence that God will make you fruitful as you love him and follow him and as you love them and serve them and reach out to them. There's nothing to be afraid of.

So this is the picture God paints of people who are beautiful and who are stable and who are fruitful. In short, of people who look more and more like the God who loves them. In verse nine we read, I'm like an evergreen cypress, for me comes your fruit.

It's another one of Hosea's mixed metaphors because if you know anything about agriculture, cypress trees don't produce fruit. But it's a wonderful image, isn't it? God is majestic and permanent and abounding in life like a stately cypress tree and he's also the life giver and the fruit bearer and the one who's working in us and through us.

And as we come to him, as we cast off our idols and worship him, we become more and more like him. Beautiful, stable, fruitful.

[31 : 12] In conclusion, I want to address just one last question. You know, as you've been meditating with me on Hosea 14, you might be thinking, Nick, I'm a Christian, but you know, I don't see this beauty and this stability and this fruitfulness in my life.

I don't see it. So what's wrong? If this is what God promises, why isn't it true for me? Well, I think there are at least three answers to that question. The first is this, is that maybe it is there and you just don't see it.

You know, it's hard to see the growth in our own lives. After all, we spend every second of every day with ourselves. And we often don't notice the gradual growth that God works in us.

You know, I've got a tree in my office that's on the verge of dying pretty much every day, but if I stare at that tree in my office, it doesn't look like it's growing. But if I leave and come back after a week and I've remembered to water it, I start to notice new growth.

You see, you need brothers and sisters who can help you see, who can say, you know, I saw how you handled that problem at work and I want to tell you that a year ago, you would have been devastated and stressed and on edge the whole time, but now, you're stable.

[32 : 25] You're growing, you're patient, you're hopeful. God's really at work in you. So if you don't see the growth, maybe you need someone who can see it for you.

But second, realize that God uses these organic metaphors for a reason, because plants take time to grow. So if you don't see lots of change in your life just yet, let me encourage you to stay on course.

His love will change you. If there's a sin you're wrestling with, don't lose heart, because he's promised to make you beautiful, and he will. If you're still shaky and worried at times, don't lose heart.

He's promised to make you stable, and he will. And if you're wondering where God has called you to love and to serve, if you're wrestling with your vocation and you can't seem to find your place, friends, don't lose heart.

He's promised to make you fruitful, and he will. So keep abiding in him and worshiping him, and remembering that he's made you his heir and his child.

[33 : 35] But third and finally, as you grasp this new status that God has given you, do you see the cost that his love has paid to make you his own? We said earlier that Hosea had to ransom his wife with what was perhaps all the money he had in order to get her back.

And we said that God, too, has paid a cost for us. Verse 7, God says that they'll return and dwell beneath my shadow. It's a powerful image, isn't it?

Under the shadow and shade of a great tree. And in an arid climate, you see, with the sun beating down, to find a place of shade meant to find a place of life and health and rest and relief.

If you don't believe that, read the end of the book of Hosea. The guy goes off his rocker because his plant dies. To find a place of shade. What did I say?

Did I say the wrong thing? Jonah. Jonah. What did I say? Hosea. Oh, yeah. That's the book we're studying right now. Jonah. Do you know the story of Jonah? He preaches in Nineveh, everybody repents, and he gets really mad, and then God causes a tree to go over him, and he's really happy, and then God causes a tree to die, and he gets really mad.

[34 : 45] He's a bigot. God corrects him. That's the story of God says, come and find your shade in me.

And to find a place of shade meant life and health and rest and relief, and to come to God is like to find spiritual shade, you see. To find a place of rest and relief and restoration. But you have to remember how shade is produced.

You see, the sun strikes the branches so that it doesn't strike us. And now you see the cost that God paid to love us, because Jesus was struck so that all who believe in him never need be.

And there's a wide, cool shade beneath the cross for all who come. So take with you words, friends, and come and flourish beneath the shade of the crucified one.

The message is this, that human flourishing begins at the cross. God's love. That's where sinners are reconciled to God. Whereas, he says in verse 4, his anger is turned away and his love is freely given.

[36 : 03] And the deeper we grasp that cost, the deeper we change. So as we conclude our series in Hosea, friends, we end with this picture of renewal.

A picture of the church made beautiful and strong and fruitful as we return to the Lord. And that's what we've been driving at in this series. That's what as pastors we've been praying through as we've been preaching this book, as we've gone deep into the dark valleys that Hosea has cast out. It's been an attempt to help us to see the depth of our sin, but the height of his love so that we can see the cross in all of its glory and so that we can know the deep and lasting renewal that Hosea is talking about right here.

Do you believe this promise, friends, that God can take your life and he can make it new? And God can take our church and he can start a work here that would surprise us and make us maybe a little worried but excite us.

And that God can take a city or a campus like New Haven or like the schools where we attend. And God can start a work of renewal there. That will be something stunning.

[37 : 25] That it will be beautiful. And that it will be strong. And that it will flourish like the grain in a field. At the center of it all is the cross.

So it's fitting this morning as we end the book of Hosea that we get to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Sort of fitting end to a book about the mercy and grace of God. So as we get ready to come to the table let me say a prayer for us as we prepare our hearts.

God thank you for the promise that all who return find mercy and find your renewing transforming grace.

God each of us here this morning you know where we're at in the journey of our life and our spiritual walk with you. God you know that there are some here this morning who are feeling cold.

You know that there are some here this morning who are feeling on fire for you. God you know there are many that are everywhere in between. But Lord thank you that we get to come as we come to the end of this book that we get to come to your table.

[38 : 43] To this meal that you've given us. Of broken bread bread and of wine poured out to remind us of the cross.

Where we can be healed and loved and renewed. Where we can find the cool shade of your grace. And where the dew of your spirit causes life to spring forth.

God meet with us as we come to the table now. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.