

The Moth, The Lion, and The Way Back Home

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Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] So, Hosea chapter 5, now hear God's word. Hear this, O priests, pay attention, O house of Israel.

Give ear, O house of the king, for the judgment is for you. For you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor.

And the revolvers have gone deep into the slaughter, but I will discipline all of them. I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me.

For now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore. Israel is defiled. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the Lord.

The pride of Israel testifies to his face. Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt. Judah also shall stumble with them.

[0 : 5 9] With their flocks and herds they shall go and seek the Lord, but they will not find him. He has withdrawn from them. They have dealt faithlessly with the Lord, for they have born alien children.

Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields. Blow the horn in Gebech, the trumpet in Ramah, sound the alarm in Beth-Avon.

We follow you, O Benjamin. Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment. Among the tribes of Israel, I make known what is sure.

The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark. Upon them I will pour out my wrath like water. Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth.

But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like a dry rot to the house of Judah. When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to the great king.

[2 : 0 7] But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound. For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah.

And even when I tear and go away, I will carry off, and no one shall rescue. I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.

Well, may God bless the reading of his word to us, and we'll come back to that very joyful passage. It's actually more joyful than it sounds, believe it or not.

There's more blessing there than you realize, and we'll come back to it after this next hymn. Have Hosea chapter 5 open in front of you, it'll help. And having made this way, or this much far through Hosea, this far away, we begin to understand, or hopefully, we begin to understand the processes of God in the lives of his people.

The beginning of the book showed us the pain that God feels, and how that pain is then reflected in a man's life who has to go out and preach this message.

- [3 : 34] And the reason why God made Hosea feel what he felt is so that he would preach with that feeling as an internal motivation.
- It's very hard not to be affected when you proclaim God's word. It's hard not to be affected when you see unfaithfulness in the world, in the church, and it not come out in your preaching.
- And one of the reasons God does this, I'm sure, is that the way that he gets people to feel what he feels is by letting them experience the same kind of experiences that he does.
- It's purposeful. Well, now that we've come this far in the book of Hosea, we recognize that God is actually in the process of restoring his people.
- But the process is going to take much longer than any of us believe that it should. It takes longer because of who God's people are, not because of who God is.
- [4 : 37] And so in chapter 2, he begins by providing a hedge of thorns and walls. And this is a measure put in place to stop his people from straying any further than what they are.
- In other words, they're already far enough as it is. And God puts in a hedge of thorns to make it painful for them to go any further. Their inclination is to walk away from God.
- And God slows their decline down by putting a hedge of thorns and by putting walls there. But these are people who are doing this who don't actually believe that they have particularly strayed in the first place.
- They don't believe for a second that they are not worshippers or not worshippers of the true God. They, in their own eyes, think that while they may recognize levels of sin, they certainly don't consider themselves in the same position that God is allowing us to see that they are actually in.
- So they are worshipping God, but they're doing it through idols. And so if you ask them, as we saw last week, are you worshipping God, they would have said yes. And if you ask God the same question, are your people worshipping you, he would have said no.
- [5 : 55] They thought the worship of God through idols was acceptable. And God, of course, knew that the worship of himself through anything other than directly was an act of idolatry and therefore was never going to be accepted.
- So these are people who's wrapped up in sin and that sin, even in the Christian life, dulls your spiritual senses. It makes you blind to the things of God.
- It makes you deaf to the word of God. It makes you unresponsive, unsensitive to what God is actually doing.
- In the same way that you can see violence on the TV, on news programs, on any type of programs, and over a period of time, the shock of that violence, you're no longer as sensitive to it as you once were.
- In the same way, you can see adverts of starving children, and you see enough of these, and they are moving as they are meant to be moving to get you to do something.
- [7 : 02] But even after a while, the sensitivity that you have towards that wears off simply by the amount that you're being exposed to it. And so what happens is that the more God's people immerse themselves in the acts of idolatry and the acts of sin, the sensitivity towards that God gives that this is wrong just wears off.
- It just, and that's what sin does. It desensitizes the person who belongs to God to the things of God. This is why Jesus says, let him who have ears to hear, hear.
- Because the difficulty is that you can't, because you've become like idols who have ears but can't hear with them. There's a direct correlation there.

So if the thorns and the wolves were to stop God's people from departing from him any further than what they were, here in chapter 5, we have the moth, the lion, and I wanted to say wardrobe.

Yeah, I can imagine it. If I was ever to write a book on Hosea, I know what I would call it. I'd call it the moth, the lion, and the wardrobe. And then C.S. And I'd have it right along C.S. Lewis' book, The Lion, the Witch, and the wardrobe.

[8 : 19] But it's not a wardrobe. It is an open door. It is where God withdraws, but there's an open door. They can return. And so God now provides measures, not only to stop his people from going any further, but actually measures to start bringing them back home.

So if I can give you an example of what this would look like, imagine the prodigal son who begins to eat pig food away from his father's home. That just looks like a consequence of his situation.

But that's the equivalent of the moth, the lion, and the open door. This is sent from God as a measure to bring him back home. Because it's as he's considered eating it that his mind immediately turns to what his father has and what his father's servants are eating.

And that's the motivation that causes him to turn around and come home. So God uses some measures to stop his people from straying any further. And then he uses other measures to start bringing them back home.

And this, in chapter 5, is the measures that God employs to begin bringing his children home. To begin bringing his people back to him.

[9 : 38] God is adamant that he will restore his people, redeem, love them, and look after them. But they don't seem to be moving their feet that quickly.

And so God increases his measures to increase the pressure upon his people to really get them to consider that being away from God is detrimental to their whole way of life.

And so there are measures to stop you from going any further and measures to bring you back home. And the speed at which this happens, it has not so much to do with God, but it has more to do with the people who are very slow to change.

Very, very slow to change. So here's the summary of chapter 5. In chapter 5, verse 1, you'll recognize that you are called, God's people are called to pay attention.

And they're called to pay attention because that is the one thing that they're not doing. And they are to learn that what they're doing is wrong. And they recognize that they have no way of getting back to God because their deeds do not permit them, verse 4.

[10 : 50] So that's the first thing that they have to pay attention to. You cannot come back to God at the same time with carrying on with what you're doing. They are incompatible.

So coming back into relationship with God and carrying on in this way are just not going to go together. So pay attention because, verse 4, your deeds do not permit you to return to the Lord your God.

Now they will try and seek after God, but they will not find him because they want to come to God for handouts of blessings without acknowledging their wrongful deeds.

They want to come back into the house like a son who treats the home like a hotel, uses up all the towels and the toothpaste and the food, and then goes out for three or four days and you don't see him again.

And the mother looks down at her son and says, you're treating this place like a hotel. Well, what God says is, you can come knocking at the door, but it won't be opened. It will not be opened to you because you don't treat me like that.

[11 : 53] You don't treat God in that way. So they seek after God and God doesn't open the door. They don't find him at home. And so God, therefore, withdraws from his people.

And he does this simply because they're not seeking God for any of the right reasons. They're not seeking God in the way that they should seek God. They simply want to come to God and have a handout of blessing without the acknowledgement of their deeds being wrong.

Because they have doubt with God falsely, verse 7. So they go elsewhere. Rather than acknowledge their sin, they go somewhere else to look for an answer.

How often that is mirrored in people's life time and time again. When I don't get the answer that I'm looking for, I go somewhere else until I get the answer that I'm looking for.

Someone out there who's like me will give me the answer that I want. And this is exactly what these people do. God will not give them the answer they're looking for.

[13 : 03] And so they go elsewhere. And they seek that there is a cure for their sickness, verse 13. But there is no cure. The sickness that they have cannot be cured.

And one of the reasons that they go elsewhere is because they don't want to acknowledge the cause of their sickness. They want the treatment, but they don't want to acknowledge the cause of their sickness.

So God, in dealing with his people, will be first, verse 12, like a moth. Then he will be with them like a lion. And then he will withdraw until that is they are ready to come back to God on God's terms.

Now this is going to restore God's people. But it's going to restore God's people properly. This isn't a half-hearted attempt. This is, if it's going to be done correctly, it's going to be done correctly from the very beginning.

God wants his people to be complete and restored and redeemed. But not in their way, not on their terms. They will return to him and be blessed by him in the ways that he has chosen.

[14 : 21] So here's the first thing to learn. That God's people are always tempted to come home for the wrong reasons. They're always tempted to come home for the wrong reasons.

Now they have assumed that they can sin and then many things in their relationship with God will remain the same. Nothing much will change. And so to pay attention to God is actually an inconvenience.

Because if I pay attention to you, I'm going to have to listen to the things that I know are wrong that I'm not wanting to acknowledge. And so paying attention to God means that I cannot carry on doing what I want to do.

I want to do as I please. And paying attention is an inconvenience to that. And then when things don't turn out the way that they ought to turn out, verse 4, they think they can just come back.

But they think they can come back without ever acknowledging their wrongful deeds. And they can't come back. God doesn't allow them to come back to his door.

[15 : 25] Now he doesn't permit them, not because God is saying no, but they're not allowed because their sinful deeds are stopping them. It's not that God is stopping them, but they are stopping themselves by continuing in the deeds that they are doing.

The problem here is not God's standard. The problem here is that they're not willing to accept God's standard. God would have them back in the blink of an eye on his terms.

But God's people want to come back and sort of retain everything else with them. And God says, you're not doing that. You don't come back into my presence and have that.

So the unwillingness is not on God's part. The slowness is not on God's part. It's actually on the part of the people who will not acknowledge that the reason they can't come back is because of the sinful deeds that they want to continue.

And so you can imagine the accusation that now follows. God's standards are so high, he's making it difficult for me to return to him. Your standards are too high.

[16 : 35] And your standards are so high that I can't actually return to you. But the problem here is not God's standards. It's rather the fact that God's people don't want to acknowledge that they don't meet the standards.

God doesn't expect his people to meet his standards. He's expecting his people to acknowledge that they're not meeting his standards. And the only way to do that is to admit that your wrongful deeds are wrong before God.

And that's repentance, that's belief, that's faith. And then God welcomes you back home and deals with the rest after that. He is seeking, verse 15, the acknowledgement of sin.

Not the meeting of his standard, but rather the acknowledgement of sin that you don't actually meet his standard. And so God is not preventing his people from returning home.

Rather, God's people are preventing themselves because they're at the stage currently where they're not willing to acknowledge their sinful deeds.

[17 : 42] They just want to come home and have a handout. They just want a blessing. They just want, let me have the gifts rather than you. Let me just have what I want.

Now, when God doesn't give his people what they want, they go elsewhere. If I can't get it from you and I still want it, then I will go somewhere else to get it.

I want you to think about that. When you don't get what you want, even as a Christian, and you don't consider that you've not got what you want because God isn't going to give it to you, are you then tempted to go elsewhere to look for it?

And I think many people are. There are many things that I can point to to indicate that God doesn't bless and there's a lesson that you ought to be sensitive to and you don't pay attention to it and so you go elsewhere just like God's people do here for the answer to be fulfilled elsewhere.

And this is what God's people do, but as they do, they don't find a cure. They go to the king and there is no cure, verse 13.

[18 : 57] The king is not able to provide anything to cure their sickness. They recognize that they're suffering the consequences of God dealing with them.

They recognize that they're suffering the consequences of their sin. They recognize they need help and so they don't go to God because they don't want to acknowledge their sin and so they go somewhere else to get the cure, but there is no cure to be found.

And this is the important question and that is why do God's people, when they know that God can provide, go somewhere else for cures?

And it seems to me that the answer is quite obvious and that is that lots and lots of people want a cure to their condition without acknowledging the cause of their condition.

Lots and lots of people want the cure for their conditions without acknowledging the cause of their conditions.

[20 : 02] They are wanting the cure without explaining how they got sick in the first place. They're wanting, well, how did it end up like this in the first place?

Where were you for that to happen? How have you got yourself into all this trouble? Are you going to help me or not? The person who says, you're going to help me or not, are you going to help me or not or do I have to explain myself?

Well, God says, yeah, you do. Explain yourself. And the people who are saying, are you going to help me or not, are wanting the cure, are wanting the solution without having to admit they got themselves into this sinful situation in the first place?

And God doesn't do it like that. He doesn't work with his people like that. The way back to God is always the way back through repentance. It is always the way back through honesty.

It's always the way back before coming clean. You can't say, well, are you going to help me or not? And sort of make the person feel bad if they're not going to help you because you won't be honest.

[21 : 12] No, come clean. Acknowledge your sin. And that's what God wants. That's how we begin to change. And so the reason why people go elsewhere is because they don't want to deal with a God who's going to say to them, and how did you get yourself into this mess in the first place?

Acknowledge your wrongful ways and deeds and your frustrations. Acknowledge it. So God then turns up the heat or God then deals with his people in a slightly different way and he begins with the moth, moves on to the lion, and then he has this withdrawal until his people return.

And so first of all, you'll notice in verse 12, God will be like a moth to his people. Now I don't know about you, but you might have a moth or two in your home.

And you know that when a moth gets into your home that some people are quite concerned to get it out of the home because of what it can do to garments. But it's a tiny, it can't cause any damage.

It's tiny, it doesn't make any noise, maybe a little annoying fluttering around the light, but at the end of the day, is it really a big deal? Well, you know it is. And the moth gets in and it subtly, quietly, even gently, destroys the strength of your garments, makes holes and creates a thorough weakness in your clothes.

[22 : 46] And you go to put it on and all of a sudden, there's just big holes in it. All because the moth have created little holes in it. In other words, the moth, it comes in to the life of God's people and weakens them.

And that initial weakness leads to a greater weakness. It's God being very subtle, being very gentle, but ultimately destroying the weak, destroying the strength of God's people.

And the reason God destroys the strength of God's people is so that they do not continue down the road of destruction. He weakens them.

He takes things away from them. There's that weakness that comes upon their bones and their flesh and their minds and their hearts. He just, and this is God dealing with his people very gentle, but he's just weakening his people bit by bit.

And at this stage, some people just don't learn. God is at work. We are to be sensitive to the fact that God is at work.

[23 : 50] And some people don't get the hint. But I'm dealing gently with you. But remember, they're blind to, they're no longer sensitive to the things of God. And so God turns up the heat.

Right, now I'll be like the lion. Now there will be sudden and immediate loss. Now you will feel what it's like to have the steel hand in a velvet glove.

It'll be thorough. It'll be strong. And you will feel the force of God upon you. So God deals gently. And then when it's time not to deal with you so gently, he deals with you a little bit more aggressively.

With a great deal of strength. In order to wake you up and to bring you back to him. And when this is not enough, he just withdraws.

And the withdrawal of God is the worst of the three for this very reason. Because it is the very thing that the unbeliever experiences. One of the worst assurances that I've ever heard people say is that I can be assured that I'm doing nothing wrong because God doesn't deal with me.

[25 : 08] He doesn't convict me of my sin. He doesn't. That's not an assurance. In Romans 1, the only person that God doesn't convict of their sin is the person that he has just let go their own way.

The person that he leaves alone to their own choices is the person who does not belong to him. So this idea that we can somehow be in a place where we don't feel the conviction of God and feel that it's an assurance is if we're completely blind and deaf to what Romans 1 actually teaches.

The person who doesn't feel the moth and the lion or any form of God's conviction is the person who doesn't actually belong to God.

All Christians are disciplined like a father disciplines his son. All Christians are dealt with by God with a form of discipline. Gentle but strong sometimes stronger and so for God to withdraw is for people to be left to their own choices without guidance, without blessing but of course the purpose here in Hosea is that they would return to God.

The purpose here is like the prodigal son being left alone knowing where the father is but the father is not with him with only pig food to eat and then realizing that these consequences whether he realizes it or not are there from God to bring him home and he goes home.

[26 : 51] But here's a few important considerations then. One of the main considerations here is whether or not you're able to spot this happening in your own life or in the life of God's church here on earth.

It's one thing to be able to learn from scripture that God can deal with us gently like a moth or that he can deal with us with great strength like a lion and that he can withdraw from us altogether and all of these are sent from him in order to bring us back, not to leave us alone but they are designed to bring us back to him.

It's one thing to know that God does that in scripture. It's another thing to notice when it's actually happening in the church or in your life or for a Christian to notice that it's happening to you or for you to notice that it's actually happening to yourself.

It's one thing to notice it in Hosea chapter 5. It's another thing to notice it on Monday morning. And I think we are called to notice it.

Why is it that some people cannot notice when God is dealing with them like a moth and like a lion? Why is it that some other Christians can notice it?

[28 : 11] And it all has to do with your sensitivity to the purposes of God. It all has to do with how sensitive you are to what God is actually doing with you and with the lives of his people within his church.

And the more sensitive you are to how God deals with you, the more sensitive you are to notice when God is dealing with you in these different ways to bring you to the place where you are meant to be.

It's very obvious, I think, if you take even a cursory look at the church today to see where God is being like a moth and a lion and where he has withdrawn altogether without any difficulty.

Just open your eyes through the lenses of scripture. It's not too difficult to see at all. So to put this perhaps in a slightly different way, the person who can notice this happening is the person who knows what God is doing.

And the person who knows what God is doing or does do is the one who is familiar with his word. And this encourages the patience that we have when God is actually dealing with his people.

[29 : 29] James speaks about this in a slightly different way and I hinted at this this morning. That when James says that if you see a brother transgressing, go and get him, who goes and gets him?

Well, it's the one who can tell the difference between truth and error. It's the one who can tell the difference between this is Christian and what he is doing isn't Christian so I will go and get him.

The brother who restores the transgressor is the one who is sensitive to what is right and wrong. The brother who restores the transgressor is the one who understands the purposes of God for life.

he's the one who goes out and rescues the other one back because the other one has had the moth, the lion and he's just and sometimes it takes others to go and get them.

So here's the exhortation. God demonstrates here in Hosea chapter 5 both patience and love. Love because his purposes is that he intends to bring his people home.

[30 : 36] patience in that they don't come to him in any way. He doesn't deal with things at a later date. He's like just come home and we'll talk about this tomorrow.

No, God doesn't do that. There's only one way back through the front door and that's through acknowledging your sin and seeking his face. Every consequence that God sends the way of his people is designed to bring them home.

No Christian can ever live with the consequences. They're not designed to be lived with. They're designed to irritate you enough to wear you down enough so that you turn and acknowledge your sin and return home.

Don't ever feel bad about praying for that to happen into the lives of some people. That God be like a moth to this person. Be like a lion to this person.

not because just because you understand that this is how God works and you understand that the reason for it is not to destroy them but actually to bring them home.

[31 : 47] It's important then to remember. Not only to know but to remember. And when I've said this a hundred times, that whatever you're dealing with in life, you're always dealing with God.

whatever you're dealing with in life, you're always dealing with God. Now it is possible to know that to be true and then not recognize it when it happens.

I know that God always deals with me, but why am I going through what I'm going through? Well, God's dealing with you and he's dealing with the people around you by dealing with you in this way.

Now it's one thing to understand that and another thing to be confused of what's actually going to happen. I don't think that as God's people looked at their strength being worn away, that they considered that as a blessing in disguise from God.

I don't think for a moment that when they considered that God towards them was like a lion, that they considered that as a blessing. They would have looked at the circumstances and gone, what am I going through this for? But God has designed it to bring his people home.

[32 : 54] So that problem, that issue, that frustration, that's God. That's God achieving his purposes. That's God shaping you.

That's God bringing you home. And why does change take so long in the lives of his people? Well, because you are so slow to repent.

I am so slow to repent. And change is always through repentance. God causes his people to change.

God calls his people to repent because he wants his people to change. So God calls his people to repent because he wants his people to change.

And the way God brings you there is by him being different towards you. Like a moth, like a lion, like a withdrawal. So here's the final call. God calls us as the church, as his people here, to pay attention, to be sensitive to how God works and why God works.

[34 : 04] And therefore as we consider the work of God on earth in the lives of his people, we can be patient. And we can recognize that the only way back to him is through the front door.

The only way back to God is by acknowledging our sin. God and seeking his face. And the reason why this is here is because nobody changes in the right way than in the way that God has laid out a person should change.

And so as we read Hosea 5, we need to remind ourselves of the word that Paul says in Corinthians, that all of these things are written down so that you, New Testament Christians, would learn from them.

learn how God deals with them so that you can learn how he deals with you. Amen. Amen. Amen.