

Route Sixty-Six

Part Twenty-Eight

Hosea

Just Like the Love of the LORD

(John 5:39; Hosea 13:14)

With Study Questions

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(John 5:39; Hosea 13:14)

You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction (Hosea 13:14)!

Introduction

One of the routine recitations in our church service is the Great Commandment found in Matthew 22:36-40. Jesus is asked “which is the great commandment in the law.” Jesus answers that it is to “love the Lord.” But Jesus adds a second part to His answer. We are also to love our neighbors as ourselves. According to Jesus, this sums up the law. So, we see a relationship between law and love.

One should not think they are truly loving God if they are in violation of the first four commandments. That is to say, if we have other gods before Him; or seek to carve Him (via images) into something other than He is; if we use His name in a vain or empty way; or if we forget the Sabbath and ignore His call to have a unique day where our hearts focus upon Him.

Similarly, one should not think they are loving their neighbor if they are dishonoring to their parents (or other legitimate authority figures); seeking to murder or hasten your neighbors death; behave in an unfaithful manner to a spouse; steal from your neighbor or lie to or about your neighbor.

A person might feel great passion or affection toward God or another person (a neighbor), but when we are in the act of violating these commandments (and by extension, related commandments), we cannot, at

that moment claim genuine love. At that moment, we are hating God and forsaking true love of our neighbors.

There are clear and objective boundary markers. And we should realize that there are consequences for these transgressions in this life. Everybody tends to look at David (who had clearly transgressed these boundaries) as if he had gotten away with infidelity and murder. But at times I wonder if there were moments when David, in light of the tragic circumstances/consequences of his sin (which included death and darkness among his own children), would have preferred that God would have taken him home rather than the judgment that he had received.

But I would like for us to take a bit of a different turn here. To be sure, law of God is tailor-made for the human condition and will bring about the best when it comes to all human relationships. At the same time, should be careful to avoid viewing the law of God as a mere set of rules to be kept in order for me to create the best home, church or government.

If there is anything unique to Hosea, it is how personal, intimate and even passionately offensive our transgressions are to God Himself. I will offer here a brief disclaimer. Without a doubt, there are segments of the Christian community that are overtly emotionally based. Feelings, passions, impulses, urges (to be frank, carnality) becomes a guiding principle of faith and practice.

There are strict prohibitions regarding the danger of this type of pursuit of the faith. It has been convincingly argued that the beginning of the end for Israel (the northern kingdom, of which we read in Hosea) was when Jeroboam organized a worship service **“which he had devised in his own heart” (1 Kings 12:33; see also Numbers 15:39).**

Convenience, novelty, imagination and innovation may be fine (and even enjoyable) in certain categories of life. But we should be as careful in our worship as a surgeon would be in a heart transplant. I wouldn't want my doctor to act upon a feeling that a certain vessel in my chest cavity is not necessary to my welfare. In short, we should be guided by the truth of God's word, over and if necessary, against our feelings.

Having offered my disclaimer, I must say that many of us make no connection between breaking God's laws and breaking God's heart. We tend to think, “He's God, He can take it.” It certainly may grieve us to hurt a loved one. It can be a strong motivational factor for obedience and faithfulness for me to avoid hurting my wife, children or friends. But in

the preface of Hosea (the first three chapters) God will not have Hosea pursue his ministry dispassionately. If it can be put thusly: Hosea will be given a small taste of what it feels like to be God-specifically, pain of loving an unfaithful spouse.

There is certainly a context where we are to understand that God is without passion¹. At the same time, God presents Himself to us as a loving, compassionate Groom, who experiences the pain of faithlessness. We realize that the Lord uses anthropomorphisms (attributing human characteristics to Himself, even though He is not human). But I fear we become too clever when we use such accommodations as an excuse to say to ourselves, He is not really feeling anything. God has never presented Himself that way. From the very beginning, we read:

**And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth,
and He was grieved in His heart (Genesis 6:6).**

Survey of Hosea

To set the context, Hosea is the last prophet in Israel (the ten tribes of the northern kingdom) before they fell to Assyria in about 722 BC. It is Israel's zero hour and Hosea has been referred to as the "death-bed-prophet." Israel had descended from being a great and prosperous nation, to a level of such irreversible corruption and moral decay that judgment was inevitable.

The outward evils which confronted Hosea included swearing and falsehood (4:1, 2); murder and bloodshed (4:2; 5:2; 6:8); robber-gangs, murder-gangs of priests (6:9; 7:1); wide spread adultery (4:2, 11; 7:4); perversion, false-dealing, and oppression (10:4; 12:7); idolatry (4:12, 13; 8:5; 10:1, 5); drunkenness (4:11; 7:5), utter heedlessness of God (4:4, 10, 8:14); adultery as part of a religious rite along with calf worship (4:14); and more.

It can be horrifyingly astonishing how rapidly a people can descend. The elderly I worked with for many years were barely able to get their arms around how acceptable it was for Clark Gable to be allowed to cuss in a movie or for unmarried couples to live together. But within a generation

¹ WCF, 2, 1.

those infractions became minor compared to flood of folly and moral bankruptcy that has won the day.

Let us realize though, the connection between the outward evil and inward ungodliness or apostasy (turning away from the true God). The outward evil is like the sore that surfaces on the skin after the blood has long nurtured an infection. When the enemies of our souls (world, flesh and devil) take captive our understanding of God and the proper worship of God (as with Jeroboam and the golden calves), it is only a matter of time before cultural (and even religious) luminaries take the spotlight to promote all those transgressions that met Hosea.

How would Hosea meet this challenge? How would God prepare Him? In the same way Paul was given a thorn in the flesh, Hosea would be given intense heartbreak before donning the prophetic mantle. The story of Hosea's wife (first three chapters) is a prologue. The prophet began to see (as a result of his own heartbreak) the deepest and most awful significance of Israel's sin. The pain of a broken family.

He was called to marry Gomer, a prostitute, who would then be unfaithful and would eventually sell herself for money and drift into slavery from which he would buy her back (Hosea 3:2). It is here that we read an admonition from God that seems to go beyond what anyone would ever learn in seminary as they prepare for the ministry:

Then the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by a lover and is committing adultery, just like the love of the LORD for the children of Israel, who look to other gods and love the raisin cakes of the pagans" (Hosea 3:1).

God would not allow a mere casual acquaintance. This ministry would be beside Hosea when he awakened and walked through his home. There is a difference between talking to people and sitting with people.

As Hosea would pursue his ministry, one of the recurring themes or challenges he would encounter is summed up in chapter four:

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6a).

Similar statements are made in Hosea 4:1; 6:3, 6. It is a sad chapter in any nation's life when ignorance of the truth and the true God prevails. It is compared to a famine.

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord God, “That I will send a famine on the land, Not a famine of bread, Nor a thirst for water, But of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11).

It is a joy for an instructor to know that his pupils are conversant with the word of God. The ministry in China may be immature as they work out their understanding of biblical theology, but I could scarcely begin a verse that every single person in the room couldn't finish.

A couple of statements are made in this category which are quite disconcerting but appropriate for our current spiritual climate. In the midst of their judgment, they cry out, “My God, we know You” (Hosea 8:2), when they did not know God at all. Similar to the warning of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount:

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²² Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness’ (Matthew 7:21-23)!

The other statement which mirrors our current culture (I might add here that I mention this so we will not be shocked or discouraged when the occurs), is also found in chapter eight:

I have written for him the great things of My law, *But* they were considered a strange thing (Hosea 8:12).

Even Orwell (apparently Orwell) seemed to understand this concept, when he said:

The further a society drifts from truth, the more it will hate those who speak it.

Let us not be discouraged nor surprised if a dying world prefers death.² Let us also be careful to avoid a retaliatory spirit. In his pain, Hosea was willing to buy his wife back. There is a gentleness we are to display in our love and ministerial pursuits.

I drew them with gentle cords, With bands of love, And I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them (Hosea 11:4).

Sadly, though God had taken the yoke from the neck of Israel, they chose to bull their necks and found themselves under the king of Assyria, an enslaved people.

Christ in Hosea

Yet, sprinkled throughout Hosea we see the promise of a greater deliverance, a deliverance through Christ. God will not abandon His people but promises to change their hearts in the “latter days.”

Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They shall fear the Lord and His goodness in the latter days (Hosea 3:5).

Of course, king David is long dead, so to whom is the text referring? The purpose of David was always to teach us of and point us to Christ. We learn from Peter that at the resurrection, Jesus took the throne of David (Acts 2:30). But it would be a heavenly and eternal throne from which He would rule and reign over all things.

² Calvin commented on this verse: *I have written*, he says, *the great things* of my law. “How much soever they may despise my law, I have yet set forth in it a wisdom which ought to be admired by the whole world; I have in it brought to light the secrets of heavenly wisdom. Since then it is so, what excuse can there be for the Israelites for despising my law?” He says, that *they counted it as something foreign*, when yet they had been brought up under its teaching, and the Lord had called them to himself from their very infancy.²

How clearly, and in how many ways, we see Christ in the words of Hosea, penned centuries before the Savior's birth.

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction (Hosea 13:14)!

There is a price to be paid for redemption, that God may be both just and merciful. It is, at times, called a ransom.

...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

As I have shared many times, it was in an effort to comfort a dear friend on the throes of his death, that he, with the force of the tide comforted me. I had merely checked in with him to see how he was. His response was as brief as it was sweet.

The price has been paid.

In His resurrection, Jesus conquered death. It is at the climax of the Apostle Paul's argument for the resurrection that we read words similar to the prophet's words:

Death is swallowed up in victory. ⁵⁵ "O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54b, 55)?

We read a story like Hosea from afar and are almost fascinated by the folly of trusting in earthly kings and carnal wisdom and rituals over a wise, loving, redeeming and heavenly Father. But we can so easily fall into a similar category when we turn our backs on the Living God. Let us not follow their example (Hebrews 3:12), but ever trust in a God of such goodness and love.

Questions for Study

1. Describe the relationship between law and love (pages 2, 3)?
2. What role should feelings play in our faith and practice as Christians (pages 3, 4)?
3. Have you wrestled with the idea of breaking God's heart? What does that mean? What are your thoughts on breaking God's heart (pages 3, 4)?
4. What was going on in Israel during the ministry of Hosea (pages 4, 5)?
5. Discuss the connection between outward evil and inward ungodliness. How do they interact (page 5)?
6. How did God prepare Hosea for his ministry (page 5)?
7. How are God's people destroyed? Explain your answer (pages 5, 6).
8. Where do we see Christ in Hosea? What difference has that made to you, personally (pages 7, 8)?