

Coming Home

Hosea

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Bible Text: Hosea 14:1-3

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Hosea chapter 14 is where we will be looking this evening, verse one.

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;
and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’
to the work of our hands.
In you the orphan finds mercy.”¹

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, again we ask your blessing and we thank you in advance for the things that you will teach us tonight. We thank you that your work in us, Lord, is faithful. Indeed, your Word tells us that even when your people lack faith you remain faithful because you cannot deny yourself. We thank you, Father, that you are holding on to us, that we are safe in your hand and in the hand of our Savior, that our destination is certain and sure and that the character of Christ is being formed in us through every trial, every test, every moment of joy and every sorrow. In it all and through it all you are at work and your work marches on perfectly and faithfully. We glorify you for this. We magnify you, Lord, for who you are and what you are doing. We thank you that we are the objects of your grace and mercy and love. We ask your blessing now as your Word goes forth. We praise this in Jesus' name. Amen.

¹ Hosea 14:1-3.

Well, as you are well aware if you have been with us throughout most of this study of Hosea, most of the message of Hosea is a message of judgment. It is a message of warning. It is the Lord through the prophet bringing his people face to face with their sins and the Lord calling upon them to recognize the gravity of their sins and the truly destructive nature of their sins. This is the main message of Hosea.

And yet what we cannot miss in the book, what is unmistakable, what appears interspersed all throughout the book is also the certain knowledge of God's love, God's amazing patience, his grace, his mercy, because throughout the book you have the Lord calling these people to repent.

Don't just recognize that you have sinned. Don't just recognize where it all leads, but recognize it so that you are rescued from it. Turn from it. Turn to the living God. Receive his forgiveness and submit your life to him. Obey him. That is the purpose of the book. That is the goal of the book.

This becomes no more clear than it does right here in chapter 14 because if you ask what is God's last word to them, what is his final word to them after all of this message of judgment, where does the book end? It ends with a message of hope. It ends with a message of grace. There is a closing call for repentance. There is a closing description of repentance. Most powerfully there is a closing promise of repentance. The Lord will bring them to repentance one day.

We will deal with this next time, but if you look at verse four he says:

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 the 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,
but transgressors stumble in them.²

But before we can get to that, we have to listen to God's call for repentance. And this is where we begin in verse one. You see the call to repentance.

“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.”³

It is a call. It is a command. It is an imperative.

“Return, O Israel.”⁴

It is an invitation. God is saying, “Come to me.”

“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.”⁵

And in this call to repentance we see something of the character of repentance. If we ask tonight, “How do you return to the Lord?” It is an important question, isn't it? Perhaps there is someone here tonight. You don't know Christ as Savior. You have not been reconciled to God. You were born into this world a sinner by nature. You have become a sinner also by choice and you are outside the loving fellowship of the living God. You don't know the Lord. And the question should be raised in your mind.

“Well, how do I get to the Lord? How do I come to know the Lord?”

Or maybe there is someone here who you know the Lord, but you are not walking with him right now in an obedient fashion. You have moved so far away from the things you have been taught, maybe even so far away from the things that you once experienced that there is actually the thought that runs through your mind. How do I get back? How do I get back to what I have been taught? How do I get back to the things that I have known with the Lord in the past?

Well, there is something here about the character of repentance. Let me remind you. Let the Lord speak to you tonight.

First of all, repentance is a personal return to God. If you are going to return to the Lord, you are going to return to the Lord. You see that in verse one.

“Return, O Israel.”⁶

² Hosea 14:4-9.

³ Hosea 14:1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Where do I return to? Where do I go? What is the address? Where will I arrive?

Well, he says, “Return to the Lord,” you see? It is a personal return. Repentance is not just a commitment to a new way. It is a fresh commitment to the Lord himself. It is a commitment to a person. Repentance is turning to the Lord himself, a fresh commitment to a personal relationship with the Lord.

Personal. Notice, he is not just the Lord God.

“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God.”⁷

This is what a right relationship with the Lord is. He is my God. He is my Ruler. He is my King. He is my Sovereign. He is the object of my affections. He is the goal of my life and the joy of my heart and the reason for my living.

And if you can’t say that, then you need to turn to him and return to him. That is what repentance is, a personal return to God.

Notice also that repentance involves a personal recognition before God. Why do you need to return to the Lord? Well, because you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Repentance requires that we recognize that we have stumbled. You can’t turn to the Lord unless you recognize your sin. And when you really recognize your sin for what it is, you could use a word like iniquity. It is a strong word. Crooked, twisted, perverted.

It is not just a mistake that you have committed. It is not just some small mess up in your life.

No, where there is real repentance, your sin is not small in your own view. In fact, it seems to be the largest thing in the world. You can’t believe that you have done it. In fact, we might even say it this way. Things that once seemed like small sins to you now cause you to shudder.

And so you recognize that you have committed iniquity. You have sinned against the Lord. But also there is this recognition of the cause and then effect of your sins. You have stumbled. Obviously this refers to the things going on in the nation, things that are going wrong.

Why is my life in the disorder that it is in? Why have things gone the way that they have? Because of your iniquity. There is this connection between sinning against God and the fruit of that sin. And you recognize it. You see it.

It is amazing. You talk to someone who hasn’t repented. Not only do they minimize their sin, but it is like they are absolutely blind to all the ways their life is falling apart even while they are in the midst of their sin, blaming other people, blaming circumstances, but

⁷ Ibid.

not seeing there is this direct connection between what you have one with the Lord and his Son and his Word and what is going on in your life, which gets to a third thing that we recognize about repentance in this call and that is repentance is answering the call of God.

Who is calling them to repentance? You say, “Well, Hosea is.”

True, but Hosea is the Lord’s messenger. The Lord through Hosea is calling the nation back to himself. God initiates our repentance. He calls us to come away from our sin. He calls us to believe in him. He calls us to trust in him. He calls us to submit to him and obey him. He calls us to rest in him. God initiates repentance so that true repentance is an answer to the call of God. We hear the Lord through his Word and we respond to his Word.

But if you want to see the grace of God here, not only recognize that God is calling them to repentance, he does something to my mind even more amazing. It is like he gives them a step by step instruction book for how to do it.

God says, “Return to me.”

If someone were to say, “Well, I don’t know how,” he says, “Well, let me tell you how. Let me tell you how to come home. Let me tell you how to turn from your sins. Let me tell you how to return to me.”

Is there someone here tonight you need to hear this? You need to return to the Lord?

He is going to tell you how. How do you do it? We have a picture of repentance here, as though God is taking Israel by the hand and telling him what to do, telling him what to say, telling him what to believe, telling him how to repent.

So here is what he says, first of all, if you are going to repent, you bring with you humble confession.

He says, “Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him...”⁸

You see, there is something you have to say.

Isn’t it interesting? He doesn’t tell them to bring sacrifices. He doesn’t, at the beginning, he doesn’t give them deeds to do. No, at the beginning, at the start of this if you want to know what repentance is, you are bringing words to the Lord. And if you recognize, as the entire Old Testament makes very plain, that God takes no delight in empty words, then when he says, “You take words to the Lord,” he is meaning this. You bring the sincere fruit of your heart, you are coming to the Lord with a honest and sincere heart and that is why you are going to say what you have to say. In fact, if all you bring are empty words, it is not repentance. It has to be genuine.

⁸ Hosea 14:2.

I couldn't help but think as I thought about that statement about the parable of the prodigal son, because you will remember as the son has wasted his inheritance and there he is, you know, feeding on things intended for swine and he is thinking to himself, "It was better for me at my father's house. Maybe if I go back, he will take me as one of his servants, because it is better for one of his servants than it is for me."

Do you remember in the midst of that parable what he does? He prepares words, doesn't he? He gives thought to what he is going to say. Listen to this. Luke 15:17.

"But when he came to himself, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants."' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'⁹

You see, I mean, he has given thought to what he has to say. And what he has to say is the honest expression of his heart.

You say, "How do I turn to the Lord?"

You bring to him words, words that reflect that you see it as God has said it. You see it as it really is. And it is honest. It is from your heart.

"Take with you words and return to the LORD."¹⁰

But now notice something. Not only does it require humble confession, repentance also will require of you purposeful requests. There is something you are going to ask for and there is a reason you are going to ask for it.

"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.'¹¹

What are you requesting? Well, you are requesting forgiveness. Take away. See, you have stumbled, verse one, because of your iniquity. What are you asking the Lord to do? To take away all iniquity.

This is focusing on the scope, the largeness of their sin. There is a recognition. My sins are enormous. Lord, I am asking you to remove them all, not only in the sense of

⁹ Luke 15:17-21.

¹⁰ Hosea 14:1.

¹¹ Hosea 14:2.

forgiveness, but there is also a willingness to have those sins removed from your behavior. You want them forgiven, but you also want them eradicated, because what you are ready to bring to the Lord, verse two, is good. What you are ready to offer to him is obedience.

You see, you have not repented if you are not ready to offer to the Lord obedience in the place of what has been your sin.

This gets to the purpose. Don't miss this. In fact, I have got to ask you this tonight. When you go to the Lord and you ask him for forgiveness, why do you want to be forgiven? Why do you want to be forgiven?

What verse two is saying is they are asking if they are following the Lord's counsel here, they are going to ask the Lord to remove all of their iniquity in order that they may offer to God what is good, in order that they may fulfill the vows of their lips. Or, to say it this way, they want to offer the fruit of their lips to God. They want to worship the Lord.

Forgiveness is going to open the door to worship.

Sometimes people want to be forgiven because they don't want to feel guilty. Some times they want to publicly give the impression of repentance because they don't want to be looked down upon. There can be a whole myriad of reasons why someone can say to themselves, "I want all my sins forgiven." But I want to ask you and this is where true repentance is at work. Is the reason you want to be forgiven because you long for a relationship with the Lord?

Because there is now this barrier, there is this sense of a problem between you and the Lord and you want that removed in order that you might worship him rightly, in order that you might give to him what he is worthy of.

This is true repentance. You are bringing words that are the honest expression of your heart. What you want is forgiveness and the reason you want forgiveness is because you long for God. You are hungry for God. You desire God.

There is something else that repentance means if we follow the Lord's counsel. We are going to take humble confession to him. We are going to think about why we want forgiveness from him. We want forgiveness that we might worship him rightly.

Third, I bring to the Lord my surrender and my dependence. I come to the Lord, you see, I come to the Lord not only saying something positive, but I am ready to say something now on the negative side of the ledger, not only what I am committing to, but what I will no longer be committed to.

No longer ... not only will I express my trust in him, I will also express what I will no longer trust in. To turn to the Lord I am turning from, you see, something. And, if you notice, it is very specific.

God has pointed out their sins and so if they are going to repent, they have recognized their sins. They are going to turn from their sins, verse three.

This is what you are going to say to the Lord.

“Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands.”¹²

Stop there. Realize what they are going to say to God. No more will we rely on foreign help. God, your design for us is that we would be dependent upon you. Your design for your people is that you would be our king and we would submit to you and trust you and love you and follow you. And here we are in our sin, having given ourselves to Baal, having walked away from your commandments and in trying to take care of ourselves, we have put our trust in foreign alliances, specifically we have put our trust in the very nation that is going to end up destroying us, Assyria. So that coming to the Lord means we are done with putting our trust in some sort of foreign help.

The Lord will be our helper.

What are you depending on in your life? What are you looking to for your sense of safety and provision and satisfaction and joy? To turn to the Lord means you are done with all those foreign alliances, all those other things you have looked to to satisfy your life. You are done with it.

Notice what else they are to be done with. They are going to say to the Lord, “We will not ride on horses.”¹³

That is, no more reliance on our own strength. He is talking about military things here, right? Riding on horses, military strength.

So on the one hand they have been looking to someone else’s strength to help them. No more with that, but guess what else they are not going to do? They are not going to depend on themselves. No more depending on their own strength in the form of their military.

Something else they are going to be done with is all their replacements for God.

“And we sill say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands.”¹⁴

We will be done with idolatry.

¹² Hosea 14:3.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

What is this? This is surrender? This is dependence? If you are not depending on Assyria, you are depending on the Lord. If you are not depending on your military, you are depending on the Lord. If you are not looking to foreign gods, you are looking to the true God.

Humble confession from an honest heart, desiring full forgiveness because you long for him, you hunger for him, you want to worship him rightly. And this means you are done with the things that have gotten between you and the Lord, your sins, foreign alliances, self reliance and false gods.

But there is one other element to repentance that we see here as the Lord is giving them step by step instructions.

Repentance means here is what you are going to do when you come to the Lord. You are pleading, it is a plea for mercy. It is a plea for mercy.

End of verse three.

“In you the orphan finds mercy.”¹⁵

What does that mean? Well, God has declared himself to be the God who has compassion on widows and orphans. Hey know this is the character of their God and because of their own sin, because of their own disobedience, because of their own stubbornness, they have now placed themselves in a position where there is no one who is favorable to them. They are alone. They are orphaned.

This gets us back to the very beginning of the book. Do you remember when the Lord was instructing Hosea how to name his children? Do you remember what two of the children were named? One was named No Mercy or No Pity. The other was named Not my Child. Both of which speak of being an orphan, left without help. And what the Lord is saying to them. This is just beautiful. Here is God saying to they people who need God, “If you will recognize that you are absolutely helpless with out me, then I will be your helper, because I love orphans.”

Can you just admit you are an orphan? Can you see what you have done to yourself? Can you recognize it is your doing, it is your sin, it is your iniquity and now you are completely helpless?

You have always been helpless. You just didn’t know it. And if you will call out to me and come to me with these words, God is saying, “I will help you.”

So you have the call for repentance and you have step by step instructions.

There is a third thing and we are not going to deal with verses four through nine tonight. We will finish the book next week. But notice I do want to make one point from the last

¹⁵ Ibid.

section. The third thing I want you to notice, the call, the description of it, the picture of repentance. The third thing I want you to notice is the producer of repentance.

This is both a response from God to what has been envisioned in verses one through three. This is how the Lord would respond to such words as these. I mean, if you come to the Lord, this is what you can expect, because this is his character. But it is more than that.

What you have in verses four and following is a promise of what God is going to do with the nation of Israel in the future. This cannot... there is nothing in the captivity and what happened in the life of the nation post captivity, before the coming of Jesus, there is nothing that you can say this is what occurred. This is still in the future. But don't doubt that God is going to do it because notice all the "I wills."

Verse four.

"I will heal their apostasy."¹⁶

They have wandered from me. They have left me, but they are going to come home. They are going to return. I will see to it.

"I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them."¹⁷

Where there is this repentance one day, the anger of God will be turned away from the people and there will be free, gracious love given to them.

Verse five.

"I will be like the dew to Israel."¹⁸

Right? Refreshment, blessing.

"He shall blossom like the lily."¹⁹

Just as water produces fruitfulness, so the Lord will be to the nation.

"He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon, his hoots shall spread out..."²⁰

And you can go on and read the rest. We will look at this next week. But it is a beautiful, flourishing, fruitful picture. And God says that he is going to do this. He is going to produce this.

¹⁶ Hosea 14:4.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Hosea 14:5.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hosea 14:5-6.

Here is my point. Repentance is needed but men can't produce it.

Does anyone here tonight know someone in your life, someone you love, who needs to repent? Maybe it is you. But if it is not, if you are not aware of anything right now in your life, clear sin that you need to repent of, is there someone you have been praying for who stands in need of repentance?

Now let me ask you. Have you come to recognize you can't produce what is needed in their heart? You can give them the Word of God. You can pray for them. You can tell them the truth. But you can't bring them to repentance, can you? But do you understand this? They won't bring themselves to repentance either.

No, the I will here is the Lord. He will do it where there is repentance.

Charles Spurgeon many, many years ago preached a sermon entitled, "Turn or Burn." Don't you love that title? And the entire sermon was a message about repentance, calling upon people to repent, showing the necessity of repentance. And listen to his final point. This is how he ended the sermon.

He said, "Now briefly, what are the means of repentance? Most seriously I say I do not believe any man in himself can repent with evangelical repentance. You ask me, then, for what purpose was the sermon I have just endeavored to preach?"

Right? If men can't repent, why are you preaching to us, Spurgeon, about repentance?

He says this. "Allow me to make the sermon of one purpose under God by its conclusion. Sinner, you are so desperately set on sin that I have no hope that you will ever turn from it of yourself. But listen. He who died on Calvary is exalted on high to give repentance and forgiveness of sin. Do you this morning feel that you are a sinner? If so, ask Christ to give you repentance. For he can work repentance in your heart by his Spirit though you can't work it there yourself."

Is there someone like that here tonight? You know you are a sinner. You know you have sinned. You know that you have violated the Word of God. But you also are aware that you can't put repentance in your heart. What do you do? You run to the Son of God who gives repentance and forgiveness of sins and you ask him by the Spirit to put in your heart what you can't put there yourself.

You can't repent apart from the grace of God, but what you can do is obey the Word of God about all the means that God uses to bring repentance.

Get out your Bible. Look at your sin for what it really is and ask the Lord to break your heart for what it is that you have done. Keep on repenting until you repent. Keep on being sorrowful until you are sorrowful. Keep on praying until you pray.

If you understand what I am saying, would you say amen? You stand... you stay on your knees and you ask the Lord to do what you can't.

Is this the kind of God, this one and only true God, is he the kind of God who hears prayers like that? Does he answer prayers like that? Isn't that what he means when he says in verse two, when the Lord counsels us to take our words to him and return to him and say, "Take away all iniquity and accept what is good and we will then pay with bulls the vows of our lips."²¹

I will worship you. Lord, forgive me of all my sins and I will worship you.

As David said, "I will teach sinners your ways. I will use my testimony to tell people of your forgiveness."

Lord, forgive me and I will worship you.

And just as Israel had to turn from Assyria specifically and just as they had to turn from their reliance on their own military specifically and just as they had to turn from the Baals specifically, so you must turn from your sin specifically.

There are two things we are pretty good at. We are good at repenting of other people's sins. Right? Lord, show them what they need to change in their life. And we are good about being really general about our repentance.

Lord, I am sorry for everything.

And I say to us tonight we don't need to repent for other people's sins. We need to repent for our own. And whatever it is that we know is wrong, wherever we have sinned against the Lord, we need to turn from that sin in very specific terms and know that he has mercy for orphans.

Let's go to the Lord together in prayer. And tonight we will just be dismissed with prayer. Let's bow our heads together.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your mercy, your long suffering with us and the fact that forgiveness in your Son is not only free, but it is complete so that, Father, what we not only need, but what we find in Jesus is the full forgiveness of our sins. And, Lord, not just that our guilty feelings would be taken away, but that we would live a life of worshipping you, that we would know the purpose for which you made us, that we would know the joy and the satisfaction and the peace and the life that is living for Christ. I pray for anyone here tonight who doesn't know you, Lord. I pray that they would seek you with their whole heart until they know you through faith in your Son. And I pray of any brother or sister who has wandered out of the way. I pray that they would keep on repenting until they repent, keep on praying until they pray, that they would bring to you

²¹ Hosea 14:2.

words from an honest heart and turn from their sins in specific terms and depend upon you completely all over again. We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.