

Hosea 5:15-6:6

15 Then I will go back to my place
until they admit their guilt.
And they will seek my face;
in their misery they will earnestly seek me."

Hosea 6

Israel Unrepentant

1 "Come, let us return to the LORD.
He has torn us to pieces
but he will heal us;
he has injured us
but he will bind up our wounds.

2 After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will restore us,
that we may live in his presence.

3 Let us acknowledge the LORD;
let us press on to acknowledge him.
As surely as the sun rises,
he will appear;
he will come to us like the winter rains,
like the spring rains that water the earth."

4 "What can I do with you, Ephraim?
What can I do with you, Judah?
Your love is like the morning mist,
like the early dew that disappears.

5 Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets,
I killed you with the words of my mouth;
my judgments flashed like lightning upon you.

6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,
and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings

Remember what happened after Adam and Eve sinned? They covered themselves with fig leaves and later tried to hide from God. Not too smart, was it? They were sort of like the toddler who covers her eyes and thinks you can't see her. We're often like that, thinking we can hide our sinfulness. We may succeed with some people but you can't fool God. We must own up to the real condition. Along with Hosea we urge

COME BEFORE THE LORD

- I. As sinners v15
- II. In repentance v1-3
- III. With sincerity v4-6

Like all of us, the people of Israel were sinners as they stood before the Lord. It was the time of the Divided Kingdom, when God's people had split into two nations. Hosea served mainly among the northern ten tribes, which retained the name of Israel.

At the time things seemed great. Under King Jeroboam the borders of the land were extended nearly as far as they had been under David and Solomon. Many people lived in luxury. Yet God saw deeper than those outward conditions. The people prostituted themselves to false gods. They engaged in fortune-telling. The fact that their hearts were not right with God produced bad behavior. Injustice and mistreatment of the poor prevailed in the land. Cursing, lying, stealing, and murder were rampant.

God was obviously not pleased. He needed to teach them a lesson. Sometimes He sends troubles to wake people up. Here He announced the withholding of blessings. "Then I will go back to my place." He would turn His back on them. They would be shut off from His presence and favor. Imagine that! We are surrounded by His goodness even in tough times. What if that were all gone?

Our loving God couldn't treat them that way forever. He would only do so "until they admit their guilt." He looked for a change: "They will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me." He has a good purpose in all He permits.

We don't need to spend all our time looking at the evil in Israel. We have plenty of our own to confess. What rivals God for first place in your life? Perhaps it is your own power and strength. Maybe your weakness is fame and fortune. Or popularity is your obsession. You are willing to turn your back on God to achieve your goal. Or we may experience more gradual separation. Life goes well, we get complacent and drift from the Lord, forgetting our dependence on Him. The condition shows in a Bible that's gathering dust or when your seat in church is empty now and then. Before long it starts happening more often. Yet we think all is fine—"I believe the same as I always did," many a straying member has insisted. But faith that is not fed withers and dies.

Like Israel, we have lowered morality. We use and abuse people in order to get ahead. We act dishonestly. Violence abounds. Sexual sins run rampant, being glorified in entertainment, reveled at on the Internet, and flaunted in lifestyle. Be aware that God can express His displeasure by allowing events to alert us to our need and dependence on Him. When troubles happen in the world, instead of complaining about how God could allow such bad things to happen, take a good look at your heart and life. Heed His warning. We come before the Lord as sinners.

II.

Struck by that message of law, we come in repentance and acknowledge our sins with sorrow. That means not coming up with excuses, blaming anybody else we can point our fingers at, or minimizing our guilt. See the enormity of your sin. Recognize more than the fact that your sin caused some problems or inflicted hurt upon someone. Don't be sad just because you were caught or embarrassed by the situation. Admit first of all that you have wronged God, who deserves flawless obedience. As King David confessed in a psalm, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."

Don't wallow in your guilt, however. Trust Jesus for forgiveness. Note the positive statements in the call to repentance: "He will heal us...he will bind up our wounds." God is just and He sent troubles upon Israel as He threatened, but only to call them back. He does not delight in causing misery. When the action has achieved its purpose, He surrounds us with His love. It was that infinite love that sent Jesus to rescue us from sin.

The Savior did the job fully. He paid every bit of the penalty when He died on the cross. God assured us of His acceptance of the payment with Christ's resurrection on Easter. He gives it to us freely. Our sins are wiped from the record.

God is faithful to His promise to forgive and to do good for us. The text compared His actions to the daily sun or seasonal rains. The land of Palestine had a dry summer. The fall brought hard rains that softened the earth so crops could be planted. Some rain fell during the next months and then there was greater rain again in spring, leading to the harvest. The people knew they could depend on it. God would not go back on His goodness.

Questions exist about the words of the call to return to the Lord. Did Hosea speak them as he urged his countrymen to join him in coming humbly before the Lord? Were they spoken by the people in recognition of their need? Either of those would fit with God's purpose as announced in the opening verse of the text.

Others see them as feigned sorrow on the part of impenitent sinners seeking to manipulate God into returning goodness to an undeserving nation. They were saying, "Let's show up in His house and bring some sacrifices. Then our troubles will be over, and we can get back to the good life we had before." That understanding fits with the accusation following in the next verses. We can debate

which view is best, but there is no doubt what God wants. Repent and look to Him for mercy. He will not turn away the sorrowing sinner.

Just the other day one of our shut-ins had the opportunity to bring such a call to return to the Lord and then to share His forgiveness. She had a substitute cleaning person, a young lady who had strayed into a number of sinful behaviors during her teen years. The girl started the conversation with the question, "Do you believe in heaven?" As she opened up, she indicated she was sure she was going to hell. She had come to realize the wrongness of her past and was turning her life around, but remained troubled with guilt feelings. There was no way God could love her. Our member told her to come to the Lord in confession of her sin and assured her Jesus had redeemed her. When she left, she commented that she felt better already. Later that day the shut-in received a phone call from the mother. "What did you talk about with my daughter?" she asked. "Since she came home she has been so happy and pleasant." God's Word works. Come before the Lord in repentance and receive His forgiveness.

III.

As we come before the Lord we need to do so with sincerity. God was frustrated with His people. "What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah?" (Ephraim was one of the tribes of the northern kingdom and a name frequently used by Hosea for the whole nation. Judah was the name of the southern kingdom.) He had tried. "Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets." Over the years, the Lord had sent many prophets, who tried to shape the nation into a faithful people like a sculptor carving rock. They hadn't listened. He tried stern words. "I killed you with the words of my mouth." The prophets preached the Law to condemn sin and kill the sinful flesh. There was no change. God's prophets received a fickle response. The Lord compared His people to the morning dew, which is soon gone as the sun rises. When they did repent, they received God's forgiveness and were blessed by Him, and then they quickly returned to their wrong ways. Sounds rather familiar, doesn't it?

God wanted genuine repentance and worship. "For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings." The people of Israel went through the motions of worship but only on the outside. They brought sacrifices merely to meet the requirements of the law. The Lord was not impressed. He sees all and knew their hypocrisy.

He had commanded the many sacrifices and offerings, yes, but He wanted them to be expressions of faith, offered from the heart, not just from a sense of duty or to meet a regulation. If they don't come from the heart, He says, "Don't bother bringing them." He doesn't need them. Furthermore, a heart right with God would show in additional ways, in mercy, that is, in being kind to the people around you. Instead they were guilty of mistreating one another, especially of oppressing the poor and lowly.

God's words cause us to pause and reflect on our worship and behavior. Take His warnings to heart. Do we know all the right words but only speak them with our lips? Do we pray piously but all the while our thoughts are wandering and we don't mean a bit of what we said, or maybe even remember what we spoke? All of us must admit problems in those areas. We can even be leaders and called workers of the congregation, but treat the activities of worship only professionally, as something we do because that's what we're paid for or were elected to do. We show up in church only to be noticed, or out of a sense of obligation. "If I don't come once in a while, I might get a visit from an elder." Our offerings might come for the same kinds of reasons. The Bible says to bring them, "not reluctantly or out of compulsion," as it states, "For God loves a cheerful giver." May our worship and gifts ever be brought with sincerity! And how do we treat the people God has placed around us? When God's law identifies your wrongs, confess your sins, and come before the Lord in repentance.

As He then graciously forgives all your misdeeds, rejoice. Recognize what a blessing He has given you. Cling to Him in faith and genuinely fight sin, pursuing God's ways. Follow Jesus with efforts to serve Him faithfully, putting off sin and putting on holiness as you thank God for His mercy. Enjoy a blessed relationship with your faithful God.