

Pastor Grady Covin
The Mission
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Hosea 6.4-11

So tonight we're going to be in Hosea chapter 6 and we're going to begin reading in verse 4 tonight as we continue our study through the book of Hosea.

In our last study we ended at chapter 6 verse 3. And though that may seem like a strange place to stop, we're just trying to follow the logical thoughts of Hosea as we go through this book. And they don't always begin and end with the beginning and end of each chapter.

God through Hosea changes direction many times as we go through this book. And so we're just taking one section at a time as it comes our way and trying our best to focus on the theme of each particular section as we come to it.

And so with that, let's hear the word of God from Hosea chapter six, starting at verse four.

4 “O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, And like the early dew, it goes away.

5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of My mouth; And your judgments are like light that goes forth.

**6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice,
And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.**

**7 “But like men they transgressed the covenant;
There they dealt treacherously with Me.**

**8 Gilead is a city of evildoers
And defiled with blood.**

**9 As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man,
So the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem;
Surely they commit lewdness.**

**10 I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel:
There is the harlotry of Ephraim;
Israel is defiled.**

**11 Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you,
When I return the captives of My people.**

So at the end of last week's section, if you'll recall, we were looking at God's call to Israel to repent. All their sins been recounted; all the things they had done wrong had been brought to light. And God had reminded them of how they had been so unfaithful to Him, but how He, in spite of their actions, had remained faithful to them.

He also reminded them that if they would repent and return, that God again would show his mercy. And then we were reminded of how God's mercy toward His people is as sure as the rising of the sun, and that eventually all these things would come to pass. One day, God's people will repent and return and when they do, He'll be waiting.

And of course we know, that day hasn't come yet and won't come until Jesus comes back. But God is patient and he has a plan and that plan includes restoring and receiving once again, this stiff-necked and wayward people.

But now here Hosea has turned back to reading the charges against Israel, because they had changed. They still weren't turning to God. And so he starts off in verse 4 by crying out. He says,

4 “O Ephraim, what shall I do to you? O Judah, what shall I do to you?”

And this is the picture of a father who's talking to his wayward children and he's saying, what am I gonna do with you? And he looks at Ephraim, who like I told you last week, was the name of the largest tribe in northern Israel, and sometimes his name was used to address the entire northern kingdom. And that's the case here. He's saying Oh Ephraim or Israel and oh Judah, who was the southern tribe, and he's looking at them as if they're two wayward sons, and he's saying, what am I going to do with you guys?

And I know God doesn't get frustrated like we do, but in a sense He's frustrated, and He says, it doesn't seem to matter what I do to you or for you, it doesn't seem to have any effect on you.

And some of us know that frustration. I'm sure my parents knew that frustration in trying to deal with me as well as my wife for many years. And many of your parents may have had that same feeling. And many of you here tonight, you've also experienced or are still experiencing that frustration.

And it doesn't seem to matter what you do or say, nothing ever changes! And many of us have done all we know to do and we're at our wits end and we're ready to just throw our hands up and give up and stop trying.

Well, that's basically where God was with these people, only God doesn't give up. And if you'll remember what He said earlier in the book, it was a reminder that He doesn't give up.

He said, **“I will woo you, I will lure you to myself.** And the truth is, God never gives up, He just keeps working His plan, and He keeps on doing what He does to see that plan through until the very end.

But for now, this is what He’s saying. He says, I've shown you mercy and you haven't turned. I've sent prophets to chastise you, and you haven't turned. I've brought judgment against you and I've disciplined you, and still, you haven’t turned. And he says, “And so what else can I do to you, oh Israel and Judah?”

And then He says,

For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, And like the early dew it goes away.

In other words, your willingness to keep your covenant to Me, and to obey me and your commitment and loyalty to me, it's like the dew that falls in the morning on the grass. As soon as the sun comes up, it evaporates; it goes away. And that's what Israel’s faithfulness was like. It would last for just a moment, but then things would go right back to where they were before. And the result was unfaithfulness.

And all throughout the Old Testament, we have story after story telling about the times when God’s chosen people would stray, and then come back and then stray again and then come back. And they were like yo-yos.

They would worship false idols and then repent and worship God. And they would follow Baal and then follow God. They would worship the golden calf and then worship God. And they were like the agitator on a washing machine. They were back and forth, back and forth; never any long term commitment or consistency in following God.

And so as frustrated parents, we can identify! And we can understand God's heart here, as He says, “I've done everything I can for these people I

love; but nothing seems to have any effect. They just continue to go astray. No matter how much I remain faithful, whether I'm faithful in mercy, or whether I'm faithful in discipline; it doesn't seem to matter to them. They just don't care.

And then he goes on and He says,

**5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,
I have slain them by the words of My mouth;**

The prophets hewed them by their words of conviction for their sin, trying to get them to repent and return to the Lord. But their hearts were hard as stone, and hard hearts require a great deal of pain to bring them into shape or subjection. And if you're a prophet or a preacher or a pastor or even a lay person who preaches or gives out the word, then as that conviction falls on that heart of stone and begins to carve out all those rough places, guess where the chips fly?

Right back into the face of the prophet or preacher. And most times the preacher or the reprover is reckoned to be the enemy, because he tells the truth. But even in the face of all that rebellion, he goes on with his work and he continues to give out the word of God so it can continue to do its' work on that hard heart.

And that's the idea when He says, I've slain you or cut you down through the words of the prophet, which in reality are God's words. And He's reminding us here, that the words of the prophets aren't just wise sayings, or things that they've conjured up on their own. These are God's words.

He says, the prophets speak for me, and my word kills. Remember, in the New Testament, what the Bible tells us about the word of God.

Hebrews 4:12, For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And so the word of God not only brings life, but it also slays.

And for those who are willing to repent and believe, the word of God gives life. But to those who reject the word of God, it brings death. And what God is saying is this. I want My word to be a word of life to you, but because you won't receive it; you're going to make it a word that slays you.

And that's why the people hated the prophets of God.

2 Chronicles 36:16, for instance, It says, But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

Israel many times despised the prophets of God and even want to kill them! Why? Because when you reject God, you hate his word. And so in turn, you hate anyone who is faithful to proclaim His word, because it slays you, it offends you. It cuts to the quick. It divides. It discerns and it changes you either for the better or for the worse.

And then He uses a different figure of speech. He says,

And your judgments are like light that goes forth.

Now He doesn't mean by **your** judgments, or by the judgments that the people of Israel are making. What He means, is "by His own judgments" the judgments which God had poured out upon them.

The judgments I poured out upon you, they're like a **light** that goes forth. In other words, I haven't left you in the dark. Even when I brought judgment against you, I sent my prophets with it to explain why it

happened. And so you know exactly **why** you're being judged. It's as clear as day, he says. But still you don't care. Still you won't turn. Still you want to continue in your sin.

And then he gets to the heart of the matter. And He says in verse 6,

6 For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, And the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

That word “mercy” in the Hebrew, it carries with it the idea of kindness or loyalty toward God’s covenant. And what he’s saying is that God desires loyalty to His covenant over sacrifices. He says, What I want is for you to know me, to really know me, to have a close and personal relationship with Me. And you can't replace that with your external sacrifices.

It’s like when the prophet Samuel spoke to King Saul.

Remember, Saul had disobeyed God, and Saul's saying, well, I did all this sacrifice for God to make up for it, but Samuel says, that’s not what God wants. God wants obedience and obedience is always better than sacrifice.

And here, Hosea is saying something similar.

He’s not saying that sacrifice doesn't matter. After all, it was God who instituted the sacrificial system. And so he's not saying that sacrifices, in and of themselves are evil, or worthless, or useless. But what he is saying is that; if you're just going through the motions, then your sacrifices are useless.

In other words, if you say, well I can either obey God, or I can sacrifice. Then since sacrificing is a whole lot easier than obeying, then I’ll just sacrifice.

In other words, I’d just rather give over a cow or two or a lamb or a goat and be able to go on and live my life however I want to. And their

thinking, was that instead of obeying God, they could just pay God off by bringing a sacrifice to atone for their sin.

And though we might wince at that, many times we do the same thing. We think we can just live in our sin, and treat the gospel with disdain, and come to church, and throw God a bone, and say a quick prayer and ask for forgiveness and then go back and do it all over again and everything will be alright?

But sooner or later, God's going to get tired of that and He's going to deal with it severely.

That old saying, "Saved by grace, what a blessed condition; I can sin all I want, and still have remission."

Well, that's not true. Jesus paid it all, but that doesn't mean He doesn't care how we live. It doesn't mean that we can just continue to live in our sin and get away with it. Or go back and forth from our sin to sorrow like a yoyo and God never do anything about it. God will eventually deal with it.

God wants all of our heart. And He want's us to be holy. Not to just put on a performance.

And then he says,

7 "But like men they transgressed the covenant; There they dealt treacherously with Me.

That word men here in this context is actually singular. And it more than likely refers to Adam. And what Hosea is probably saying, is that they're just like Adam, the first man, in that they have transgressed the covenant.

God made a covenant with Adam, who was our first father in the garden. And God is reminding them of how Adam dealt with God? And God's saying, Adam betrayed me. When he should have been faithful, he

betrayed Me. Adam knew me! He walked with Me in the cool of the day. And He should have remained faithful to me, but he didn't. He transgressed the covenant. He betrayed me, and just like Adam, so has Israel. Israel's done the same thing.

I entered into a covenant with Israel. And Israel was to be my bride, and I was to be her groom. And Israel was to be my son, and I was to be her father. But just like Adam, Israel has broken the covenant, over and over again they have broken the covenant, and they have dealt treacherously with Me.

And then he gives an example of their treachery. He gives the example of a city. It's the city of Gilead. And he says,

8 Gilead is a city of evildoers And defiled with blood.

Now, that phrase "defiled with blood" literally means, foot-prints or foot tracks from blood. And there are two things are in view here. First is the place and second is the pollution.

Now, Gilead in the Bible is sometimes referred to as a mountain range, which is a region just east of the Jordan River, but here Hosea seems to be talking about a specific city. And these men of Gilead are not only barbarous and wicked, but they're murderous, and they evidently have a reputation for being murderers. And so Gilead is a city of evil-doers, who specialize in murdering men.

And the result of all these murders is footprints of blood throughout the land and this is of course blood from their victims.

And so God is looking at all these things that happened in Gilead and He's saying, this is basically how you've been treating Me. Because you have betrayed your covenant with Me, and because you have ignored My word, you're no better than these murderers.

And then in verse 9, He gives them another example. He says,

9 As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man, So the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem; Surely they commit lewdness.

Now, if you know your Old Testament, then you probably already know about the cities of refuge, that were set up throughout the land of Israel. They were actually part of the distribution of the Promised Land among the twelve tribes of Israel. If you'll remember there was one tribe, the Levites, who were not given any land to develop.

Instead, they were to be the priests of God, and the overseers of the tabernacle, and the religious caretakers of the people.

Well, since the Levites had no specific territory, they were distributed throughout the land and stationed in all these different cities as priests.

And so that was basically their inheritance. And there were forty-eight of these cities spread all throughout the land of Israel.

Now, of these forty-eight cities, six were designated as cities of refuge. And the city of Shechem was one of the six.

Now, the Mosaic Law stated that anyone who committed a murder was to be put to death. An eye for eye and a tooth for tooth. But for unintentional or accidental deaths, God had set aside these 6 cities to which the killer could flee for refuge, so he would be safe from a family member who might try and avenge the death of their loved one; at least until the case could go to trial.

And when it would go to trial, the congregation would judge the person and determine if the attacker had acted on purpose or unintentionally. If it was an accident, he would be allowed to return to the city of refuge, and he could live there safely, until the death of the high priest who was in office at

the time of the trial. And then at his death, he would be free to return to his property.

Now, if the attacker left the city of refuge before the death of the high priest, then the avenger would have the right to kill him.

But what God is saying here is that Shechem, is no longer a place of refuge for people, but rather a place where the priests themselves are guilty of murder. And it's not clear exactly what's going on here, but in one way or another the priests were misusing the system for their own gain.

Now, back then, many times the priest would get involved in politics and in overthrowing the king. And so it could be that God was referring to something of this nature.

Or He could have been referring to the fact that they were playing God with people's lives by showing favoritism to certain people, and not others. In other words, they perverting the justice system by picking and choosing for themselves who would live or die.

If you came from say a well off family or a certain tribe, or if the priest liked you, then he would make sure the ruling went in your favor. And vice versa. But whatever they were doing, God's saying they were doing something very evil in this city. So evil, He calls it lewdness, which means filthy or shameless.

And of course, it's happening in this city of refuge, where it's supposed to be a place where people can find justice and sanctuary. Not a place where the blood of people would be shed unjustly.

And so whatever the evil that was going on, the priests were a part of it. And instead of being part of the solution, they were part of the problem. Those who should have been leading the people in godliness; are leading the people in wickedness. And so that leads the Lord to deliverance.

He says in verse, 10 I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel: There is the harlotry of Ephraim; Israel is defiled.

And so once again, he's using the picture of lewdness or sexual immorality, and He's referring specifically to their worship of the other gods. And God looks at this and he says, this is a terrible, and horrible, and awful thing that defiles the land.

You know sometimes people look at worshiping other gods, and they think, well that's okay. That's just freedom of religion, and people ought to be able to do whatever they want to do in that respect. Everybody has the right to worship whoever or whatever they want.

But you need to recognize that thought for what it really is. That's a man-made thought or law. God never said that. God never said you're free to choose whatever god you'd like. You can't just make up a god on your own and think that's your right. God says He and He alone is worthy of our worship.

Now, He might say choose who you're going to serve, but there's still only one right answer to that. Any other answer, and you spend eternity in hell paying for that bad decision. And I can assure you that's not freedom.

And then in verse 11, he says and by the way,

11 O Judah, a harvest is also appointed for you,

Remember, Judah was the kingdom in the south, and so he says to them; you also have a harvest coming.

Now, a harvest can be good or bad. A harvest to a farmer is a good thing, but the harvest in view here, is judgment. And of course the word of God reminds us that we reap what we sow.

Galatians 6:7, Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. 8 For he who sows

to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. 9 And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart.

And though their harvest is not gonna come for another hundred years or so, still it's going to come. And even though they're probably going to forget Hosea's words by then, that's not going to change anything. God has said it and as sure as the sun's going to come up tomorrow, judgment is going to come.

And it did come for all of Israel, both the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. And their lands were destroyed, and the people were exiled and that's where this section ends.

And the next section which we'll take up next week Lord willing, is going to begin with the last statement here in verse 11.

It says, **When I return the captives of My people.**

That's going to be the theme next time. And so if you want to read ahead, we'll start here and go through the entire 7th chapter next time, again if it's the Lord's will.

And so that's all for tonight. Any questions?