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 The Mission
 May 20, 2026

Hosea 14.1-8

If you have your Bibles with turn with me to the book of Hosea, and to Hosea chapter 14. And this is our last chapter, but we're not going to finish tonight. We'll be looking at verses one through eight and then the very last verse, we'll save for next week, because it's actually a summary to the entire book all by itself. And since it more or less stands alone, we'll deal with that one last verse next week as we finish up the book of Hosea.

But for tonight, we'll be looking at verses 1 through 8 of chapter 14.

**Hosea 14:1, O Israel, return to the Lord your God,
 For you have stumbled because of your iniquity;
 2 Take words with you, And return to the Lord.
 Say to Him,
 "Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously, For we will offer
 the sacrifices of our lips.**

**3 Assyria shall not save us, We will not ride on horses,
 Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, 'You are our
 gods.' For in You the fatherless finds mercy."**

**4 "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely,
 For My anger has turned away from him.**

**5 I will be like the dew to Israel;
 He shall grow like the lily, And lengthen his roots like Lebanon.**

6 His branches shall spread; His beauty shall be like an olive tree, And his fragrance like Lebanon.

7 Those who dwell under his shadow shall return; They shall be revived like grain, And grow like a vine. Their scent shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

8 “Ephraim shall say, ‘What have I to do anymore with idols?’ I have heard and observed him. I am like a green cypress tree; Your fruit is found in Me.”

Let’s pray.

When we met last time, if you’ll remember Hosea had brought his case against the people of Israel, or the northern kingdom, to a close. And he showed them the sentence that God had declared upon them; the sentence of death.

They had sinned and they would not turn from their sin. They continued to seek after their false gods and worship the golden calves. And for that, God had placed them under the sentence of death as far as the covenant was concerned.

And so destruction was coming their way in just a few years through the Assyrian army. And it would have been righteous and just for God to have ended the book of Hosea right there on that note; that death is coming upon them for their sin.

For when we sin, we die. The scripture is clear about that. The soul that sinneth shall die. The wages of sin is death. That’s Romans 3:23. But then we see the incredible mercy of God, as Hosea adds this last chapter and here the tone of everything changes.

God as judge, has just declared his people guilty. They have sinned and they deserve death according to the stipulations of the covenant. But now,

as a pleading father, and as a loving spouse, which are the two themes that we've seen throughout the book, He makes one last appeal to his people.

In the first four verses here, he calls his people to repentance. He says, in verse 1, **O Israel, return to the Lord your God.**

He's imploring them one last time to repent. He says, I've just declared the death sentence upon you and your only hope is to return to me. Your only hope is to turn away from your false idols. And He pleads with them again to return to him.

It says, for **you have stumbled because of your iniquity.** It reminds them, because of your sins, you've stumbled. You've fallen away from faithfulness. You've fallen from the place of covenant blessing to a place of covenant cursing. And then he tells them, he instructs them as if they're little children. Just like sometimes you tell your child, to go to so and so, and tell them this or that.

Tell them thank you, or I'm sorry or say please. Tell grandma and grandpa thank you for the birthday present or whatever. And you put words in their mouth. Well, that's what God is doing through Hosea. He's putting words into the mouth of Israel.

He says, this is what you need. You need to take these words with you and you need to return to the Lord. You need to say to Him, take away our iniquity, and receive us graciously. In other words, He says, go to God and ask Him to take away your sin, and to receive you again. Ask Him for mercy!

Say Lord, **we will offer you the sacrifices of our lips.** Your translation may say, "we'll offer a sacrifice of praise". Either way, the idea is that an animal sacrifice, even the best animal sacrifice they could give,

couldn't take away their sin. There was nothing they could do to cover their sin.

But they could bring their praise. They could give God the sacrifice of their praise. They could leave their bulls and lambs and their goats behind and just come and praise Him as the merciful and loving God that He was.

And really that was the root of their problem. Instead of giving God the thanks He deserved, they gave thanks to the golden calves and to the false gods.

And then he says and you also need to declare, that Assyria cannot save us. We will not ride on horses.

In other words, you need to confess that there's a Savior in no one else but God! Remember, before they kept trying to make a peace treaty with the Assyrian army, so they wouldn't come and kill them. And they thought, well, if we just give them all of our silver, and all of our gold, and everything else of value, maybe they'll spare us and we won't die under God's curse.

But he says, you need to reject that, because there's no salvation in man. And you need to also reject your own self-righteousness, and your own strength, and your own self-sufficiency.

That's what he means when he says, **“they'll no longer ride upon horses.”**

It has this idea of having military strength. God had always warned the people of Israel from multiplying to themselves horses and armies because then they would think they had become self-sufficient. And they would think, we're strong enough to deal with our enemies on our own. And so we don't need God anymore. We've got this.

And we hear people say that all the time. “We've got this” or “You've got this!”

Well, God doesn't want us to have everything. He wants us to give everything to Him. In everything by prayer and supplication Paul says.

So God says, You need to repent of that. And stop thinking you can do **anything** in your own power. You need to be coming to Me and you need to say, "I don't got this! And we know that nobody can help us but You.

So what God calls Israel to do is, not to pull their boot straps up and live a better life in their own strength, but rather to throw themselves upon His mercy. To turn from their sin and to trust in His mercy and grace. He says, "that's your only hope". You're under the death sentence because of your sin and you need to repent and you need to trust that I am the Only one who can and will save you.

And friend, that's the gospel; is it not? We're all under a death sentence before Christ and our only hope is to be saved and Jesus is that hope. He's the One and only way to be saved.

And then in **verse 4, He says "I will heal their backsliding, and I will love them freely for My anger has turned away from him.**

In other words, if the people would only repent, then He says, I will heal their backsliding. I will heal them of their sin problem. I'll take away the power of sin over them and I'll bring them healing. And that's what Israel needed. That's what we all need.

Israel was dying under the disease of sin, their own sin, their own corruption, their own deception. But God says, I'll heal you of all that if you'll repent.

And then He says, **I will love them freely.** In other words, no longer will I hate them. And this is a reminder again of the theme of this book.

Remember very early in the very beginning of this book, the marriage of Hosea and Gomer was a picture of God and his people. And then Gomer

went and played the harlot and left Hosea. But Hosea kept pursuing her until he brought her back and he loved her.

And God is saying to his bride, Israel, he had cast her off, he had divorced her as far as the covenant was concerned, but He says, when you repent, I'll love you again. And I will have compassion upon you.

He says, I won't bring you back into My house and treat you as a slave. I'll bring you back in love, and treat you like My wife.

He says, **for my anger is turned away from him.**

God promises that when Israel returns in repentance, He'll no longer be angry with them.

And then in verse 5 he says, **I will be like the dew to Israel. He shall grow like the lily and lengthen his roots like Lebanon. His branches shall spread. His beauty shall be like an olive tree and his fragrance like Lebanon.**

Here again, are a bunch of phrases that you'll find in the book of the Song of Solomon. And these are all descriptions that are used to describe the beauty of the bride. And he said, I'm going to make you beautiful again. You had turned away from Me. You were like Gomer, the harlot, but I'll make you like my beautiful bride again, if you'll come back.

And then He says, **you'll be like the lily**, which is beautiful and very fruitful. They say that from every one of the lilies that grew in Israel, each lily would produce about 50 bulbs. And that's great, but that's not enough, because the lily doesn't have a very deep root. And so he says, I'll also make your roots grow deep like the cedars of Lebanon. And then you'll branch forth like a giant tree.

And so these are pictures of how He will forgive his bride and then make her beautiful again. How He will restore her to her position and to her beauty.

And then in **verse 8 he says, “Ephraim shall say, ‘What have I to do anymore with idols?’**

He says, when I make you my beautiful bride again, You'll turn away from the idols once and for all and you'll no longer say, “let me go after these other gods.

Just like Gomer was called to no longer go after other men. It's like you'll reject them because what you'll find is that all your blessings are found in me.

And then He turns from talking about them to himself. And He says, **I have heard and observed him. I am like a green cypress tree; Your fruit is found in Me.”**

This is God speaking. He says, You can come and find shade or comfort or relief under me. And all of your fruitfulness will come from me. In other words, what God is saying, is that when you repent, I'll restore unto you the blessing I promised. I'll forgive you and I'll make you My people again. I'll make you my bride and I'll make you beautiful. And then you'll realize that I'm your greatest blessing.

It's not the other stuff out there in the world, it's me. It's in me where you find your fruitfulness. It's in me where you'll find shade and comfort and peace.

Now we know how God eventually does that. Because after Hosea; prophet after prophet after prophet comes with the same message to Israel. Repent or die.

But of course, Israel wouldn't listen and they continued in their sin until God finally destroyed the whole northern kingdom. And that happened just a few years later in 722 BC, but still during the lifetime of Hosea.

And the southern kingdom of Judah didn't learn their lesson either, and they followed in the same sin as the northern kingdom. And God brought judgment down upon them as well when the Babylonians came in and destroyed their land and took them away into exile. And that was in 605 BC.

But the people still didn't learn, because when John the Baptist arises many years later, even after God has been silent for 400 years, what's the first thing he does? He comes preaching repentance. And then the Lord Jesus Christ comes. And He comes to deliver them from their sin. He comes as a substitute for his people.

And he lives a perfect sinless life and He obeys the law of God in their place as their substitute. And then as the Lamb of God, He suffers the wrath and curse of God, which is meant towards Israel, and He receives the death penalty. And then He suffers it upon the cross.

And that's what God means, when He says, I will no longer be angry with them, because that's what satisfied God's wrath. And so Jesus becomes the propitiation for our sins, which is just a hard word that means a "sacrifice that satisfies wrath". And Jesus was the sacrifice that satisfied God's wrath in connection with our sin. And He did that of course by laying down His life on the cross of Calvary.

After God poured out his wrath upon Jesus on the cross, there was no more wrath to be poured out upon his people. And now salvation is offered full and free to anyone who would receive it.

So what do we learn from all this?

Well, first, we see the grace of God in calling people to repentance. Sometimes I think we forget about that. And when people preach repentance, we think they're somehow being mean. But we forget how gracious God is, just to grant us the opportunity to repent.

Trish and I when we went to California back during the first of the year, we went to the Rose Bowl to watch Indiana play. And while we were standing in line to get on the bus to take us to the stadium, there were several street preachers there with microphones and they were preaching to these long lines of people who had no place to go. And they were forced to hear their preaching and their message was that which we read in Hosea; repent or die.

And you could tell that a lot of the people were irritated at that message, because to a lost person; it sounds harsh. And even in the church today, people get offended when preachers preach about sin and when they preach about repentance. And people ask things like, Well, where's the love of God in all that?

Well, that is the love of God. The love of God is in the ability to repent that God through His mercy and grace has given to us. When Adam and Eve sinned, God could have just said, well I told you, you were going to die if you sinned and now that you've sinned, you're going to die and then left it at that. He didn't have to come up with another way to make everything right, but He did.

I mean think about it. When the angels sinned, they were cast out of heaven with no more hope of return ever. And God could have treated Adam and Eve and everybody else after them, the same way, but He didn't. Instead He made a way for us to live?

He says, repent and turn from your sin and turn to God and live.

But now, not only does He call us to repentance, but we know from the Scripture, that He actually **gives us the gift** of repentance. We're dead in our trespasses and sin before Christ. And left to ourselves, we can't do anything about it. And yet, God in His mercy and grace and by His Spirit, **causes** us to be born again, and gives us the ability to repent.

That's why many times we refer to repentance as saving grace. Because it's a gift that God gives to His people so they might be saved. And thank God for the grace of repentance. And so that's the first thing we learn; that God gives to us repentance.

But then secondly, we learn that **we need** to repent of our sins. What good is it if we have the option to not die, but don't take it? If God calls you to repentance, and you realize the incredible grace, and you realize that I don't deserve that grace, and I deserve to die, but then you don't repent. Then what good is it?

Well, that was Israel's problem. They heard it again and again and again and again. And as incredibly gracious as it was, and as wonderful as it was, and even though it was the greatest news they would ever hear; that they could be delivered out of death; still they rejected it.

Why?

Because they were in love with their sin. They loved their sin more than they loved the gift that God was offering to them. And how many people do you reckon, have grown up in church, and they've heard the good news for all of their life, but they will die in their sins and spend eternity in hell, because they have never received it. They continue to love their sin more than they love and trust God.

So we learn how wonderful the grace of God is in granting to us repentance. And then we learn the need to respond to the call to repent by actually repenting ourselves, and coming to the Lord in faith, and trusting that He **will** show us mercy for Jesus' sake.

And then thirdly we learn the result of our repentance. We learn that when we repent, that God, for Jesus' sake, restores unto us the blessing, He intended for us all along.

And the greatest of the blessings is Himself. The greatest of blessings is to be restored to a right fellowship with God in Christ and through Christ. And so we go from cursing to blessing in Jesus through repentance and faith.

And so when you look at your life and you see your sin, the first thing you should recognize is, I don't deserve the good that God wants to give me. I really deserve to die to spend eternity in hell. And really that's what we all deserve. But God in His mercy, and in His grace has made a way for us to live. And that way is through believing and trusting in Christ and the work that He accomplished on Calvary.

What a great God we serve. Amen! And what a great gift we've been given. Let's pray.