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The story of the gospel is really the fullness of what God did throughout scripture... He called us to repentance and delivered us from the devastation that we brought on ourselves. Jesus is the epitome of that story, because He bought us back from our self-inflicted slavery with His own blood. He delivered us from ETERNAL slavery. I pray that we will never lose sight of how desperate our need is for Him, and how incredibly compassionate He is for us in filling that need.

*Blessings,
Jonna*

Hosea 10:1-12

Isaiah 48:17-18 says, "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the LORD your God, who teaches you to profit (what is best for you), who leads you in the way you should go. Oh that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea.'" That's the heart of God. He wants to pour out His blessing of righteousness and peace on us. It's never that God withholds. It's that we refuse to come to Him. That's what Hosea 10 is talking about. The pride of Israel grew so much that they rewrote history and forgot how God had so faithfully delivered them over and over again. They were the epitome of a prodigal. And yet He still calls us to repentance SO THAT He can restore us. He doesn't call us to grovel and try to earn our way back to Him. He just calls us to come to Him. That is enormous, supernatural mercy and compassion and love. O Lord, please teach me Your heart as I study Hosea 10:1-12.

Vs. 1-3 ~ "Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The Lord will break down their altars and destroy their pillars. For now they will say: 'We have no king, for we do not fear the Lord; and a king—what could he do for us?' They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field."

The book of Hosea starts with a really hard love story. God told the prophet Hosea to marry a

woman who God knew would prostitute herself and leave her husband. She would be sold into slavery, and Hosea would go and buy her back. God told Hosea to do this to symbolize the adultery of Israel against Him. He said Israel was worse than prostitutes because they didn't even get paid for their "whoring." They paid to do it! God does not view the choice to rely on self-pleasure, self-protection, self-pity, and self-rule as a small thing. That's why His mercy is SO AMAZING!!! He is not casting the adulterers away. He's calling them to repentance... and Jesus is the groom who paid to buy us back from slavery. He paid for us with His own blood.

These verses are saying that the Lord blessed His people and they decided to take credit for His work AND THEN build pillars to worship false gods!!! Why would they do that??? False gods are simply excuses for self-gratification.

The Lord let them feel the consequences of their choices. They had divided hearts, unwilling to honor Him in truth. And so the Lord broke their altars to the false gods, just as He did with my heart when I served the god of self-pleasure and self-pity. Even as the Israelites chose to worship false gods and ended up in slavery to the nations around them, they still refused to fear the Lord and worship Him.

They spoke empty words and made false promises to God like, "If You'll help me out of this mess, I'll never ask for another thing." Or, "If You'll deliver me from my slavery, I'll serve You forever." God DID deliver them over and over again... just read the book of Exodus and the book of Judges to see how they continued to slide back into idolatry even though He was so merciful with them! I made empty promises to God... I didn't think they were empty in the moment, but my drift back into SELF was like a rollercoaster of faith. God is so good!!! He never gave up on me just like He never gave up on them.

God brought the consequences of their choices by letting the poisonous weeds infect their fields... not to let them be destroyed, but to bring them back to Him. The one who destroys is the liar who promises that false gods will satisfy. God restores the repentant and humble. Satan's only goal is deceive and destroy. He's at the core of every false god.

Vs. 5-8 ~ "The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests— those who rejoiced over it and over its glory— for it has departed from them. The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol. Samaria's king shall perish like a twig on the face of the waters. The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, 'Cover us,' and to the hills, 'Fall on us.'"

There were Hebrew people who had gone to live in Samaria... they ended up intermarrying with the other people there, and they were called Samaritans. The Jews hated them. They considered them "half breeds." These people celebrated the glory of idolatry rather than the glory of God. They were taken captive by the Assyrians. Samaria's king, whose rule they were under by choice, was broken like a twig. Any king or ruler who thinks he has more power than

God will eventually find out just how little power he actually has.

Beth-aven stands for "a house of idolatry" and the calf is the idol sacrifice. The people mourn for that, not for their sin against God. They mourn that God has destroyed their places of idolatry. Doesn't the fact that the idols aren't able to stand against the power of God tell them that they're worshiping the wrong god??? Doesn't the fact that God takes their pagan places of worship and makes them so desolate that weeds and thorns take over tell them that the throne of God is greater than their pagan altars? O Lord, this makes me think of Your words in Isaiah 55:13... for those who come to You... "Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress. Instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle." Following You is so much better!!! There is never ruin and destruction for those who come to You... even when they're repenting from years of adulterous rebellion and idolatry.

Vs. 9-11 ~ "From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah? When I please, I will discipline them, and nations shall be gathered against them when they are bound up for their double iniquity. Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck; but I will put Ephraim to the yoke; Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow for himself."

The days of Gibeah refer to a horrific story in Judges 19. I don't even want to repeat what it says. Here's the bottom line... Ephraim, another name for Israel, should have had its neck broken for what the people did... but God spared her neck, and put a yoke (a farming instrument that went on the neck of the ox to plow the fields) on it instead... to have to plow and harrow for himself. But even this is a sign that there's still hope. God didn't break their neck. He put them to work so that they could see their need for Him.

Vs. 12 ~ "Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that He may come and rain righteousness upon you."

Vs. 13 says that they had plowed iniquity and reaped injustice. God was calling them to something more... to a new purpose. Instead of sowing with a view to SELF, sow with a view of righteousness... loving what God loves and hating what He hates. Instead of reaping injustice and pain, reap God's love being poured out on you.

Break up your fallow ground... Hebrews 3:13 calls this "being hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Get rid of the hard ground of my heart... How do I do that? Seek the Lord. He rains righteousness on me. I don't make myself righteous in order to earn back His favor. I sow with a view to His righteousness, and He pours it on me. It's from HIM!

The big lie that Satan wants me to believe is that serving false gods will be more satisfying than serving God. And when he has chewed me up and spit me out, the massive lie that he tells is that God would never want a broken person like me. But if I'll just look to His word, I will see that He wants me! He is waiting to rain down His righteousness on me so that my peace can flow like a river. This is repeated over and over throughout His word.

I need to pray Hosea 10:12 for prodigals... that they would recognize their need for God, break up their fallow ground and seek Him. I don't have to pray for Him to receive them home. He will. I need to pray for their hearts to wake up and return to Him. O Lord, I praise You for being so faithful and merciful and compassionate! Thank You for letting us experience the weight of our rebellion so that we can return to You. Thank You for welcoming us home with open arms.