

Please turn in your Bibles to Hosea chapter six and seven. I'll be reading and preaching from the Christian Standard Bible, and you can find the text printed for you in your bulletins if you want to follow along there. Well, in the book of Hosea, we are continuing to learn much about our sinfulness as humans.

Though this isn't always pleasant, it is good for us. It's important for us as God's people to allow God's word to search our hearts and to expose the ways in which we may be living in rebellion to him. We need to see and we need to understand the foolishness of going our own way and our need to repent and turn to the Lord. And Hosea helps us with this. But Hosea also reveals God to us. In the pages of this book, we come to know more of God's heart for His people.

We see His agony over their sin and their foolishness. We see His desire for them to turn from their sin and to come back to Him, to love Him, and to be faithful to Him like He is to them. The last time we were in Hosea, we finished by looking at verses 1 through 3 of chapter 6. And in these verses, Hosea had issued this call to God's sinful, unfaithful people.

He said, come, let's return to the Lord. For He has torn us, and He will heal us. He has wounded us, and He will bind up our wounds. He will revive us after two days, and on the third day, He will raise us up so we can live in His presence. Then he says, let's strive to know the Lord. His appearance is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring showers that water the land.

So even though Israel had been like an unfaithful, adulterous wife to the Lord, he still desires for her to return to him. He wants his people to acknowledge their sin and their unfaithfulness toward him and turn from it and strive to know him. But Israel will not listen. They refuse to turn from their sin and come back to Him. So look at the first half of verse 4 and observe God's heart for His people that comes through in this. God says, what am I going to do with you, Ephraim? What am I going to do with you, Judah? Can you hear the pain and the agony in God's voice?

He's like those parents who lie awake in bed at night, agonizing over the sinfulness and rebellion of their child. If they didn't love their child, they wouldn't care that they were making foolish choices, but they do love their child. They care deeply for him, and so they rack their brains trying to figure out what can we do for him? What can we say that will finally get through? What can we do that will finally cause him to turn from the error of his ways?

Have you ever felt this agony over someone that you love? You see that they are making a mess of their life and it's just killing you inside. Your heart hurts for them as you just watch them sprint down the path to destruction. This is what God is feeling toward his stubborn, rebellious people. Despite all his warnings, all his discipline, they continue to forsake him. Look at the rest of verse four. God says to his

people, your love is like the morning mist and like the early dew that vanishes. What a heartbreaking assessment of his people.

Instead of remaining faithful in their love, Israel's love is like a middle school relationship that starts in the first period and is over by lunch. It's fleeting. There's no commitment. Before you know it, it's just gone. It vanishes like the early dew. It disappears like the morning mist. What about your love for God? Is your love for God characterized by fickleness or by faithfulness? Is it fleeting or is it enduring?

A great test of your love for God is what Jesus says in John 14, 15. Jesus says, if you love me, you will keep my commandments. Jesus saying that our love for God is demonstrated, it's proven through our obedience to God. So how committed are you in your love for God? Do you obey God? Do you seek to do what God says for you to do? It is in our obedience to God that we prove our love for God.

And Israel has failed terribly at this. They have not obeyed God or been faithful to God. And so look at what God says in verse five. This is why I have used the prophets to cut them down. I have killed them with the words from my mouth. My judgment strikes like lightning." God executes His judgment through His sovereign word. Back in Deuteronomy 27-30, God had made a covenant with His people. He promised to bless them if they obeyed Him and discipline them if they disobeyed.

When God's people turned away from Him, God had sent His prophets to warn them of His coming judgment. They were breaking the covenant they had made with Him, and this would inevitably bring the covenantal curses upon them. But God's people continued in their sin and their rebellion against God. They ignored the warnings of the prophets and continued to run headlong into the discipline of God. And they did all this while keeping up the externals of their religion.

Look at verse six. God says, for I desire faithful love and not sacrifice. I desire the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. God is not interested in external displays of religion. God desires our faithful love. He desires for us to truly know him. God is after a relationship with his people. Think about it like this.

Those of you who are married or want to be married, do you want a spouse who simply fulfills his or her duty to you but does not love you or take an interest in knowing you at all? Would you want to be married to someone who simply did what they were supposed to do but made it clear that their affections and their interests lay elsewhere? Of course not. That's not a marriage. That's not even a relationship. It's a business transaction. I do this for you, you do this for me.

And though this is how many of the world's religions work, this is not how it works with the God of the Bible. He is a relational God who created us to be in relationship with Him. His desire, as verse six says, is for us to faithfully love Him, to truly know Him. And if we faithfully love Him, we will do what He commands. We will faithfully love others. but the opposite is true as well. The less we love God, the less we will love others. What we see in verses seven through nine is that because Israel's love for God was so fleeting and so fickle, their society became less and less characterized by love and more and more characterized by violence.

God says of them, but they, like Adam, have violated the covenant. There they have betrayed me. Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with bloody footprints, like raiders who wait in ambush for someone. A band of priests murders on the road to Shechem. They commit atrocities. There is no love of God, and so there is no love of others. Violence and bloodshed rule the day. Verse 9 says they commit atrocities. You can only imagine what all that includes. And all this is because they have betrayed the Lord their God. They have stopped loving him, and they have gone after other lovers. And the result has been the degradation of their society.

Look at verse 10 and following. God says, I have seen something horrible in the house of Israel. Ephraim's promiscuity is there. Israel is defiled. A harvest is also appointed for you, Judah. When I restore the fortunes of my people, when I heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim and the crimes of Samaria will be exposed, for they practice fraud. A thief breaks in. A raiding party pillages outside. Notice that verse 10 says God has seen something horrible.

God is very aware of his people's sinfulness, and his assessment of them is not good. He says their sins have caused them to be defiled. Nothing they have done has gone unnoticed by God. But look at verse two and notice the disconnect between how God's people are thinking about their sin and how God is viewing their sin. God says of them, but they never consider that I remember all their evil. Now their actions are all around them. They are right in front of my face. God's people have fooled themselves into believing that God's patience in delaying judgment must mean that God has forgotten all of their evil. And so they have continued in sin, thinking that God must not remember what they have done.

I think this is one of the greatest lies that sin tries to sell all of us. Our sin tries to convince us that we can actually disobey God and get away with it. Have you noticed this about your sin? When you are faced with a temptation to disobey God, your sins will go out of its way to make you believe that you will be able to get away with it, that you are somehow special, that you won't get caught, that no one will find you out. So you tell one lie and you get away with it, and so you tell another. And the more we give into our sin, the more emboldened we become.

Instead of actively fighting certain sins in our lives, we begin to get comfortable with them. We deceive ourselves into thinking that God doesn't really see or he doesn't really care that much. But God is saying to us today that that is a wrong way of thinking. It is foolish to think that God doesn't remember our sin.

In fact, God says their actions are all around them. They are right in front of my face. God is intimately aware of all of his people's evil. Nothing they have done has truly been done in secret. Everything they have done has been done right in front of God's face.

Is this how you think about your life? How often are you aware that you are living your life before the face of God? That he is always watching, that he's always listening, and he's not forgetting anything. Israel never considered this. But do you consider this? Are you consciously aware that all of life is lived right in front of the face of our God?

God sees what you do on your phone. He sees what videos you watch, what articles you read. God observes how you interact with people during the week. He hears what you say, what you laugh about. Children, God knows when you disobey your parents, even if you've been clever enough to trick them. You can't trick God. God sees, and God knows. The reality is that there is nothing that we do that is hidden from God.

Do we regularly consider this? Do you consciously think about the reality that everything you do is being done before the face of God? Are you living your life to please God, to bring a smile to his face? Or do you live to please yourself or someone else? Israel did not care about pleasing God. Instead, look at who they pleased and how they pleased them. Look at verses three and following. God says they pleased the king with their evil, the princes with their lies. All of them commit adultery.

They are like an oven heated by a baker who stops stirring the fire from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened. On the day of our king, the princes are sick with the heat of wine. There is a conspiracy with traitors. For they, their hearts like an oven, draw him into their oven. Their anger smolders all night. In the morning, it blazes like a flaming fire. All of them are as hot as an oven.

They consume their rulers. All their kings fall. Not one of them calls on me. In these verses, Hosea is describing the corruption of the leaders of God's people at this time. At this time in the nation of Israel, political corruption and violence was rampant. In 30 years, the 30 years to the end of Israel's life as a nation, over those 30 years, Israel had six different kings, and four of those kings came to the throne by assassinating their predecessor. Israel's sinful passions and desires burned hot like an overheated oven and brought ruin and death to many. Drunkenness, immorality, power plays were the rule of the day and the result was that their rulers were consumed and all their kings fell. Israel played with fire and

they got burned. But the sad and sobering reality of where Israel is at spiritually is stated at the end of verse seven.

God says, not one of them calls on me. No one is calling out to God. No one is seeking God's help. Everyone is taking matters into their own hands. Everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes. The result is that God's people lost their purpose, their very reason for existing. They were to be God's holy, distinct, and special people.

They were to be a light to the nations, but look at what Hosea says in verse eight. Ephraim has allowed himself to get mixed up with the nations. Ephraim is unturned bread baked on a griddle. Instead of being a light to the nations, Israel has become mixed up with the nations. They have forsaken the Lord their God, they've gone after the gods of the nations around them, and so they now look and they act like all the other nations. As a result, God says, they are like unturned bread baked on a griddle. They are burnt on one side and raw on the other. In other words, they're ruined. They're useless, you can't eat that. A pancake that has not been flipped is not worth eating.

Through their mixing with the pagan nations around them, Israel has become ruined. She is sinful and she's corrupt and unable to display God's holiness and goodness to the world. But the sad and sobering reality is, is that Israel does not even realize how far gone they are. Their sin continues to blind them to their true spiritual condition. Look at verse nine.

Foreigners consume his strength, but he does not notice. Even his hair is streaked with gray, but he does not notice. God describes his people like Uncle Rico from Napoleon Dynamite. An old man who is clearly past his prime, but living in absolute denial of that. Israel thinks they are young and strong, that they can still throw that pigskin a quarter mile, but they have grown weak and gray without even noticing. Now thankfully this won't happen to me because I have a wife and kids that love to point out my gray hairs.

But Israel is like a foolish old man who is completely out of touch with reality. He doesn't even realize that his life is nearing its end. But what is it that causes such self-deception? How can Israel not even notice what is happening? How can Israel be this blind? Look at verse 10. Israel's arrogance testifies against them. Yet they do not return to the Lord their God. And for all this, they do not seek him.

Israel's stubborn pride has blinded them to their need for God. They are too arrogant to realize that they have grown weak and old. They still think that they are in their prime, that they would be able to just pull themselves through on their own strength. And so they don't seek the only solution to their nation's problem. They do not return to the Lord their God. even with all the political chaos and the instability, all the hardships and the difficulties they are facing as a nation, they do not seek the Lord their God.

They cannot humble themselves to acknowledge their sin and turn to the Lord for forgiveness and healing.

This is why pride is so, so dangerous. Their arrogance only leads them into greater and greater stupidity. Look at verse 11. Instead of calling out to God and seeking him, look at what Israel does. So Ephraim has become like a silly, senseless dove. They call to Egypt and they go to Assyria like a silly, senseless dove. Israel flits back and forth between different political alliances. Instead of looking to their God to be their protector and defender, they foolishly run to the nations around them for help. First Egypt, then Assyria.

What about you? Does your life have some dove-like qualities to it? Are you quick to jump from one thing to the next to the next, hoping that it will finally satisfy you and give you what you desperately want? Do you fly from one relationship to the next, each time believing that this next person will finally meet all your needs? Do you jump about from one job to the next, thinking that you'll eventually find the meaning and the purpose that you crave for your life? Do you constantly switch your investments around, hoping that you'll finally achieve the financial stability and peace that you long for? Do you jump from one Amazon purchase to the next, hoping that it will finally satisfy you? Think about your life this morning. Do you notice a flightiness about yourself? Are you quick to flit from one thing to the next?

Are you like a silly, senseless dove jumping about because you have not found your satisfaction and fulfillment in the Lord your God? Notice the connection between verses 10 and 11. It is because Israel has not sought the Lord their God that they have become like a silly, senseless dove. Their rejection of God has caused them to flit erratically about from one thing to the next, never fully satisfied.

Consider what this teaches us about the human heart. We are all seekers. We all seek meaning, satisfaction, joy, peace in life. We were created to find all of this in our God. But when we do not seek it from Him, we don't stop becoming seekers. We just become futile seekers. Always searching for something that can only ever be found in the one we've rejected. And so, like a silly senseless dove, we flit from one thing to the next, constantly searching, but never finding what our souls truly desire. Not only is this an exercise in futility, it also invites God's discipline. Look at verse 12.

God says, as they are going, I will spread my net over them. I will bring them down like birds of the sky. I will discipline them in accordance with the news that reaches their assembly. Israel's rejection of God in pursuit of other lovers will not bring God's favor, but his discipline. They have been arrogant and foolish and must now face the consequences for their actions.

In verses 13 through 16, we get an insight into God's heart toward his people. God does not delight in disciplining them. God's desire is to redeem them. His hope is that they will turn from their foolishness

and sin and seek him. But sadly, Israel refuses, they continue to sin against him. Look at what God says in verses 13 through 16.

Woe to them, for they fled from me. Destruction to them, for they rebelled against me. Though I want to redeem them, they speak lies against me. They do not cry to me from their hearts, rather they wail on their beds. They slash themselves for grain and new wine. They turn away from me. I trained and strengthened their arms, but they plot evil against me. They turn, but not to what is above. They are like a faulty bow. Their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent tongue. They will be ridiculed for this in the land of Egypt.

Notice all that God says His people have done to Him. They have fled from Him. They have rebelled against Him. They speak lies against Him. They do not cry out to Him. They turn away from Him. They plot evil against Him. God has been a faithful covenant partner, but His people have been utterly unfaithful. They are the ones who have broken the relationship. They are the ones who have abandoned Him. They are the ones who have walked out on Him.

God, on the other hand, is the one who has wanted to redeem them. He would love for his people to turn from their sin and to seek him, and he would forgive them and restore them. God is also the one who has trained and strengthened their arms. Like a loving father, he was invested in their growth and development. He was the one who loved them and provided for them, but all they want to do is plot evil against him. They want nothing to do with him.

And the result of this will be their destruction and their shame. Verse 16 says, their leaders will fall by the sword because of their insolent tongue. They will be ridiculed for this in the land of Egypt. And this is exactly what happened in 722 BC when Assyria came and conquered them. God's fickle, corrupt, senseless people were destroyed. and sent into exile. They had repeatedly broken their covenant with their God, and finally, all of the covenantal curses that God had been warning them about for centuries fell on them.

Let's pray. No. Is this the end of the story? Do you think the God that we meet in Hosea, the God who longs for his people to return to him and seek him, who longs to redeem him, do you think this God will be content with judgment having the final word? Absolutely not.

The God we meet in Hosea is a God who loves and longs for a relationship with his people. And so as we continue reading in our Bibles, we see God's answer to the question that he posed in Hosea 6, 4. God had asked, what am I going to do with you, Ephraim? What am I going to do with you, Judah? Your love is like the morning mist and like the early dew that vanishes. God's people's love is so fleeting. It's not faithful like God's love. So how can a relationship with them ever work? Well, God's answer to his

question was to become one of his people. The eternal Son of God entered the womb of the Virgin Mary and was born as a baby boy.

He grew up faithfully, loving the Lord his God with all his heart, with all his mind, with all his strength. Instead of his love vanishing like the early mist, it endured and remained strong all throughout his life. Because he loved God perfectly, he was able to love others perfectly as well. He fulfilled God's desire for someone to faithfully love and know God.

And Jesus never once betrayed God. He lived every moment of his life perfectly before the face of God. He never got mixed up in the sin of those around him. He remained faithful to the mission God had given him. He always sought the Lord and never flitted about thinking that anything other than his Father's love could satisfy him. Jesus perfectly kept the covenant. Jesus perfectly loved God.

But even though he deserved God's blessing for his obedience, Jesus willingly exchanged places with us. On the cross, he became our substitute. He took upon himself the curse and the judgment that we, his people, deserved for our fickle, corrupt, and senseless ways. He was ridiculed and mocked for our sin as God's judgment fell upon him.

But after enduring the full fury of God's just and righteous wrath toward his people's sin, God raised Jesus from the dead and promises that anyone who believes in him will be saved. All of their sins will be forgiven and they will be credited with Jesus's perfect record of faithful love and obedience to God. And what's more, God promises to address the very heart of his people's problem. And what is that problem? Our fickle, corrupt, senseless hearts. In the new covenant that Christ established through his life, death, and resurrection, God's spirit gives us new hearts to know and to love the Lord our God. Listen to what God promises in the New Covenant. Ezekiel 36, 25 through 27.

He says, in the New Covenant, I will also sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean. I will cleanse you from all your impurities and all your idols. Full forgiveness. And then he goes on and says, I will give you a new heart. and put a new spirit within you. I will remove your heart of stone, that fickle, senseless, corrupt heart, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will place my spirit within you and cause you to follow my statutes and carefully observe my ordinances.

Dear Christian, you are vastly different from unregenerate Israel in Hosea's day. In Jesus Christ, God has done for you what you could not do for yourself. And through his Holy Spirit, he is now empowering you to do what you could not do in your own strength. And so, in the power of God's Spirit, Commit yourself once again to know and love the Lord your God. Don't revert back into your old ways of living. Learn the wisdom of Hosea. Lean into the gospel realities that Christ has purchased for you in the new covenant. Grow in your love for God and your love for others. Let's pray.

Gracious Father, thank you for your faithful love for your people. Thank you for sending Jesus to live the life of perfect love and obedience to you that we could never live. Thank you that he willingly became our substitute and died in our place and for our sins. Thank you for raising him from the dead and giving salvation and the gift of your Holy Spirit to all who put their faith in him. I pray that we all would be those who trust and treasure the Lord Jesus Christ. We ask all these things in his name, amen.