

They will earnestly seek Me! (Hosea 5 and Hebrews 12:4-17) 4-June-2017 ¹

Good morning Church Family!

Please have your Bibles opened up to Hosea chapter 5.

There's the usual outline in the bulletin to follow and take notes, if you wish

First - let me ask God for his help and guidance in understanding His Holy Word.

Let's pray...

Recap

First up - let's remind ourselves of the book of Hosea so far

[Powerpoint 1-Recap]

God tells prophet Hosea to marry Gomer, who will be an unfaithful wife to him

Hosea's marriage to Gomer is a picture of God's marriage to Israel

Hosea like God is a faithful, loving husband

Gomer like the nation of Israel and the individuals of Israel is unfaithful - chasing after false and fake gods like Gomer chasing after over lovers

Then we saw that God told Hosea to take back Gomer and be reconciled to her, even though she had been unfaithful

And this is a picture of how God reconciles us back to Himself by forgiving us through Jesus' death on the cross

So chapter 1-3 are like a helicopter view of the book

Last week - chapter 4 - God showed Israel and us - what we lack.

We lack...

Faithfulness to God, - Love - and Acknowledgement of God

And that He wants to be our shepherd and for us to be his lambies (4:16)

This week the charges against Israel continue

As God shows where they - and us - are going wrong

Call for Leadership to listen up! (v1)

And look at verse 1!

There is a call for the leadership of Israel to listen up!

Hosea addresses the priests, the people of Israel and the royal family.

And it's mainly the leadership of Israel who's to blame!

It's like the people are sandwiched in the middle of that verse between poor leadership from the priests (as we saw last week) and poor leadership from the royal family, especially the King

It's the leadership that's got Israel in the mess they're in

They're the ones who will be judged more harshly

Instead of being an encouragement to the people - they have led them astray with false teaching and false worship

As it says in verse 1 - the leadership are supposed to be a help to the people but they have been a snare and a net - in places in Israel which were formerly known as great places of worship - they have allowed and encouraged false worship!

What about leadership today?

In the world? In our nation? In our church? In our ministries we are involved in?

In the groups we're part of?

Are the leaders modelling godly behaviour?

Are the leaders making godly decisions?

Are their decisions consistent with God's holy word - or are they hypocrites - saying one thing but doing another?

[Powerpoint 2-Call for Leadership to listen!]

According to the Bible - leaders are more accountable:

See James 3:1

Not many of you should become teachers [*master or leader*], my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

The reason they are more accountable - is because they are responsible for a lot of people - and they could lead a lot of people down the wrong path - and they can cause a great deal of damage and hurt

See also 1 Timothy 3:1-2a

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer [leader] desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer is to be above reproach [above criticism]

Are we holding our leaders accountable? Whether secular or church leaders? Are we letting them know when their decisions and their behaviour is inconsistent with God's holy standards?

(pause)

Are we encouraging our leaders? They really need it! [e.g. Lyle Shelton]

Are we praying for our leaders? Please pray for the elders of our church!

(pause)

Charges (v2-7)

So the leadership is on God's radar

Hosea gives the charges that God has against them

These charges are in verses 2 to 7:

See verse 2 - they are knee deep in slaughter - and it's likely the word for slaughter here is to do with sacrificing children to false gods to gain favours from these false gods (the same Hebrew word is used in Isaiah 57:5 and Ezekiel 16:21 to mean child sacrifices) -

No wonder God says in verse 2 - He will discipline them!

We might be thinking - well I'm not sacrificing children - so it doesn't apply to me?

[Powerpoint 3a-Children]

But if we're modelling the wrong things to our children and grandchildren - aren't we sending them towards false gods - and leading them away from the one True God?

In case you hadn't noticed - children watch grown-ups - like a hawk

I've seen the way, our granddaughter, copies everything her mum does!

And it's not just the children who are watching our behaviour

Verse 3 says God knows all about Ephraim (the largest tribe) and Israel can't hide from Him. Psalm 139 tells us that God knows everything - He is all powerful - and He is everywhere!

Let's not kid ourselves - God knows every corrupt thought we have - and He knows every corrupt word we say before we say it - and we can't hide any corrupt behaviour from Him!

[Powerpoint 3b-half-hearted]

Then in verse 4 - the people make a feeble attempt to return to the Lord - but they can't because they have a spirit of prostitution in their heart

In other words they are coming to God to worship Him but their hearts not really in it - they still wish they were worshipping the false gods

You see the problem is - like we said last week - they don't acknowledge God as the one true God

What about us - when we come to church to worship - or when we have quiet times with God at home (if we do?) - Do we come willingly and full of excitement - or do we come begrudgingly - wishing we were somewhere else - or wishing we were doing something else. Is our acknowledgment and love for God - genuine or just lip service? Are we looking at our watches - hanging out for the sermon to finish - so we can have morning tea? Is our worship of God half-hearted?

[Powerpoint 3c-arrogance]

The next charge is in verse 5 - Israel is arrogant

Being arrogant means having an exaggerated sense of our own importance and abilities

In Israel's case - they think they know better than God!

What about us?

Do we think we know what's best for us - rather than trusting God?

Do we think God makes mistakes?

Do we give God advice?

Do we think His warnings in His Word and His requirement for us to be obedient are just "guidelines"?

[Powerpoint 3d-withdraw]

The result of the bloodshed and slaughter, and their half-hearted worship and their arrogance is there in v6 and v7

God will withdraw Himself from them

And remove His blessings from them

For us - if we continue to rebel against God and continue to be half-hearted in our worship of God and if we continue to think we know better than God -

God will withdraw from us

God will remove His blessing from us

Do we want to really risk that?

(pause)

Consequences (v8-15a)

Now any sin and rebellion against God

There are consequences

God warned Israel - He would withdraw and remove His blessings

And we see in verses 8 and 9

[Powerpoint 4a-surrounded]

The Northern Kingdom of Israel are threatened by war

There are 3 battle cries in three towns - in Gibeah, Ramah and Beth Aven

History tells us that the Northern Kingdom of Israel were constantly threatened by invasion from the mighty Assyrians in the North

And if that wasn't bad enough - the Northern Kingdom's southern neighbours -

Judah - the Southern Kingdom - well their leaders - in v10 - are moving the

boundaries between the south and north - to grab more land - whilst the North

are preoccupied by an invasion from Assyria in the north!

The Northern Kingdom are surrounded by enemies!

As verse 11 says - they are oppressed - and it's all because of their idolatry in worshipping false gods

This is a picture of what life is like - when God withdraws

It's like being surrounded by enemies - it's dark - it's scary - it's not a place or situation to be in!

Do we want to risk being in a situation like this - where God has withdrawn from us?

Hosea describes the predicament of Israel in verse 12

As being like they are moth-eaten - slowly being eaten away by the enemy

And even Judah - the South - aren't off the hook - it's like they have dry rot spreading through them!

[Powerpoint 4b-help in wrong place]

To make matters worse - when Ephraim (Israel) saw the predicament they were in - they didn't turn to God for help - in verse 13 - they turned to their enemy Assyria - and looked for help from the King of Assyria?

What about us?

Who do we turn to for our help? God - or someone or something else?

If we have a problem in our marriage? Do we men turn to another woman for help?

Do our women turn to another man for help? Do we listen to non-Christian's advice about our marriages and act upon it?

If we have financial problem? Do we try to solve it by stealing, or tax evasion or a false insurance claims and so on...

When we're feeling down? Do we try to fix it - with a shopping spree we can't afford - or by over-eating - or by getting drunk - or over-indulging?

Are we looking for help in all the wrong places?

There's only one King who can help us! King Jesus!

What we need to realize is - that God won't tolerate sin and rebellion against Him - He likens himself - in v14 - to a lion devouring Ephraim (the North) and Judah (the South) - and then He goes back to His lion's den in verse 15

And then He waits and He waits...

[Powerpoint 4c-purpose]

You see - THE WHOLE PURPOSE OF GOD'S PUNISHMENT and DISCIPLINE is not to pay us back for our sin and rebellion - it's for the reason given in verse 15a It's - until they - the people - have borne their guilt - in other words until they've come to their senses and admitted their sin and rebellion -

It's the same for us - God wants us to come to our senses, realize our guilt and admit our sin and rebellion against God

REQUIRED RESPONSE (v15b and Hebrews 12:4-17)

These charges that God lays against Israel and US

Require a response

And it's there in verse 15b

God says - the response should be:

[So they] seek my face - in their misery they will earnestly seek me.

The Hope for Israel, Judah and US - is that the discipline and punishment for our sin and rebellion against God - will make us earnestly seek God's face

[Powerpoint 5a-Seek]

What does - earnestly seeking God's face mean?

Well - to seek God's face means to be in front of God, close to Him, in His presence - up close and personal -

It means spending sincere genuine time with Him - not half-hearted

And to seek him earnestly - means to seek Him early and be diligent about it

So first thing every morning - make Him a priority in our life

Each morning we have breakfast to give us fuel and energy for the day

In the same way - we need spiritual food - to give us spiritual energy

So our first response should be - to **earnestly seek God!**

Our second response is to realize our guilt because of our sin - and admit we have sinned against God and say we are sorry - REPENT

[Powerpoint 5b-Repent]

Not like a child says: SORRY - sorry that they are in trouble or sorry they got caught - rather than genuinely saying sorry that they did the wrong thing

What stops us seeking God and saying sorry?

Pride in our self?

Doubt that He can help us or teach us anything?

Our own sinful nature?

A lack of commitment to God?

Our NT passage from Hebrews 12:4-17

Teaches us

- To realize that God disciplines us like a parent disciplines a child
- So we endure hardship like a child endures discipline from a parent
- Discipline is for our own good - not harm
- Discipline is not pleasant
- But it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace
 - It will mean making effort to live in peace with one another
 - It will mean being holy - dedicated to God - in word, in pray, in worship, and in service - set apart for God's use - WHY? Because Jesus died for us!
 - It will mean saying no to any bitter thoughts and words - REPENT
 - It will mean saying No to sexual immorality - REPENT
 - It will mean saying No to any godless behaviour REPENT
 - It will mean watching out for the Esau syndrome: trading away God's lifelong gift in order to satisfy a short-term appetite.

A godly father will forgive his children unconditionally. At the same time, a good relationship between father and son cannot be achieved until the relationship is restored. This can only occur when a child confesses his mistakes to his father and apologizes. That is why we confess our sins to God—not to maintain our salvation, but to bring ourselves back into close fellowship with the God who loves us and has already forgiven us.

So we need to repent daily and confess our sins to God:

As 1 John 1:8-10 says:

⁸If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.¹⁰If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Are we confessing our sins to God daily and keeping a short account with God?

(pause)

Conclusion

So let me finish with an illustration to show us how God disciplines:

There's a story of a father who wanted to teach his young son responsibility

So he told his son that when he arrived at his friend's house - just a few streets away - he must phone home to say he had arrived safely.

After a while - as the young boy grew more confident in his ability to get to his friend's place - the young boy began to forget to phone home.

The first time he forgot, his father phoned to make sure he had arrived.

And the father told him the next time it happened, he would have to come home.

A few days later, however, the boy went to his friend's house - and there was no phone call!

The father knew if he was going to learn, the boy would have to be punished.

But the father didn't want to punish him.

So he went to the telephone, regretting that his son's great time would be spoiled by his lack of contact with his father. As the father dialled the number, he prayed for wisdom. He heard the Lord saying to him "Treat him like I treat you,"

So the father dialled the number and let the phone ring once and then hung up!

A few seconds later the phone rang, and it was the young boy!

"I'm here, Dad!"

"What took you so long to call?" the father asked.

"We started playing and I forgot. But Dad, I heard the phone ring once and I remembered straight away!"

(pause)

How often do we think of God as the One who waits to punish us when we step out of line? I wonder how often He rings just once, hoping we will phone home.

(pause)

Let's pray...