Hosea 4-7 • My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge

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We're in Hosea chapter 4 this evening and starting, the first 3 chapters which we covered last week of Hosea really kind of tell the story of Hosea and the fact that he was called by God to take an unfaithful wife which must have been a crazy, weird thing to hear from the Lord, but he did out of obedience.

And of course that became a picture of God's relationship with Israel, that Israel had been unfaithful. And so as we get into Hosea chapter 4 and through really the end of the book, we are dealing essentially with God's message primarily to the northern Kingdom of Israel, although he throws in some comments and statements from time to time that are geared to the southern Kingdom of Judah.

So just keep that in mind that this is primarily for Israel and it's because they have been unfaithful. They have been engaged in spiritual adultery and where God is the husband and Israel if you will, is the wife.

And it's a very similar relationship between the church and Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that He is our groom and we are the bride and so we have a very similar sort of a relationship in that respect. When you get into Hosea chapter 4 and you're reading, I don't know if you've ever tried to just read through the book of Hosea, just start at the beginning.

Again, the first 3 chapters are pretty interesting. You get into chapter 4 and you kind of feel a little bit like you're kind of getting stuck in the mud just a little bit because there's just a lot of statements where God is confronting the Nation of Israel with their unfaithfulness and tells them that judgment is on the way.

And those can be difficult to read for several chapters at a time. We're going to do our best to bring out the important elements of these chapters and the things that are noteworthy and that sort of thing as we go. But as we do, let's just start with a prayer and ask the Lord to open our hearts.

Father, this is your word and we believe that it is through the Holy Spirit that we gain access to an understanding of the word. We believe, Lord, that the Spirit enlightens us and so we ask you, Father, to do that tonight, especially as

we get into what is arguably some more difficult chapters here in the book of Hosea. Lord, but this is your word, and you saved it for us for a reason, that we would get into it, that we would study it, that we would know what it says and why.

And so we ask you, Lord, to give us the ability to have the attention and the insight to gain from these passages what you would have us to gain. Teach us tonight, we pray, and we ask it in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, amen.

All right, chapter 4, it begins by saying:

[1] *"Hear the word of the Lord, O children of Israel, for the Lord has a controversy…" (ESV)*

Now that's an interesting word. The ESV uses that word controversy as do a couple of the other translations. But some of the others say, "*the Lord has a case*" or "*is going to bring a charge*."

And what we're talking about here is God bringing a charge like you would taking somebody to court. It's making a case against someone and He says:

[1] *"… the Lord has a controversy with the inhabitants of the land. …" (ESV)*

And here is the Lord's complaint at the end of verse 1 and that's very simple.

[1] *"… There is no faithfulness or steadfast love,* (and that can be translated mercy) *and no knowledge of God in the land;" (ESV)*

And that's essentially what God sees from His perspective. He says there's no faithfulness, it's gone. There's no steadfast love toward one another, mercy shown to one another, and there is no knowledge of God in the land any longer. And guess what you find in a culture where those things are missing? He describes it in verse 2:

[2] *"there is swearing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed." (ESV)*

And there it is. So God has made His case and He says, this is what I see, this is the result, this is the nation you're living in right now. Kind of sounds to me like the nightly news when you read that description and you kind of wonder, what God would say if He were saying, okay, here's what I see in the United States of

America, here's what's going on. Probably be very similar, very similar, indeed. Well, so what is the result of all these things going on?

Verse 3:

3 "Therefore the land mourns, and all who dwell in it languish, and also the beasts of the field and the birds of the heavens, and even the fish of the sea are taken away." (ESV)

Guys, we have so little understanding of the repercussions of sinful behavior. Today, you'll hear somebody talk about their behavior and they and they might say, well, you don't, you may not agree with my lifestyle or the things that I do, but if I'm not hurting anybody else, what is it to you?

And I wonder if somebody's even ever said that to you. I'm not hurting you by what I do, I'm not hurting anybody else, if I'm hurting anybody, I'm hurting myself and that's mine to do. If I want to hurt myself, that's my business.

Well, first of all, that's a very selfish outlook, but it's a very shortsighted outlook as well. Because God shows us that our sin has repercussions beyond what we can even understand or what we think. We think it's just confined to my life, it's ridiculous. God says that these things have an impact. They certainly have an impact on other people, but even on the land, even on the land.

Do you remember what God said to Cain after he murdered his brother out in the field? He says, the ground cries out to me, the ground cries out to me where you've shed the blood of your brother. (Genesis 4:10)

Now that's an interesting insight, but it's one that we wouldn't even begin to fathom without God revealing it in His word, that there are larger implications and repercussions to the sins of our lives.

Verse 4 goes on, He says:

4 "Yet let no one contend, and let none accuse, …" (ESV)

In other words, you see all these things going on, but don't go throwing around accusations to one another.

4 "…for with you is my contention, O priest." (ESV)

Because here's what God is saying, and He goes on in verse 5 to say:

5 *"You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother." (ESV)*

And that is the nation of Israel at large. But I want you to notice who He's essentially pointing the finger at here. He's pointing it at the priest and the prophet. And so he starts with the leadership. And do you understand that the responsibility is with leaders? It starts with the leaders, it doesn't end with the leaders, but it starts with the leaders and people it's the same in your home.

And one of the things I have to try to communicate sometimes to men is that you're the head of your home, that's what the Bible says, I didn't make that up. It says, you're the head of your home as Christ is the Head of the church. And if there's an issue that God has with your home, guess who He's going to take it up with first? He's going to come to the head, He's going to deal with it there.

Yeah, there may be repercussions down the line as well, but I want you to see here that there's this order that God uses as He comes to Israel. He says, I have a word here first to the priests and the prophets, because they have been given the task of speaking to the people in my name and drawing them to me, but they have not done their job.

And then the next statement is also very interesting in verse 6, look at this.

6 *"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge;* (He goes on to say) *because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children." (ESV)*

This is such an important statement for us to stop and think about for just a moment, because the idea that my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge is so true even today in our world.

We consider ourselves to be very knowledgeable today, and we have a lot of knowledge about things. The internet has given us that, I have to say that with the advent of the internet, it is really amazing.

Just today I was listening to a song that I hadn't heard for a long time and I just got onto Google and I just typed in lyrics and then typed the name of the song and just, there it is. Just anything I want, I mean, I can, I've learned how to do things and it really is very wonderful. I mean, the internet is really pretty cool when you stop and think about the knowledge that we have gained.

I can, we're driving along in our car and we're going through a city, and I'll say to myself, or I'll say to Sue out loud, I wonder what the population of this city is? You ever do that? Because I'm one of those people who narrates as I drive along, but I can just hit a little button on my dash and I hear this bloop!, which is Google wondering what I'm want to ask right now. And so I say, "Hey, what's the population of Des Moines, Iowa"? Well in 2018 the population was, etc. What's the elevation of Elco, Nevada? What's the…? (google search) I can instantly get that information.

And we think that because we have access to that quick information that we are swimming in knowledge, and yet I believe, that we are destroyed for a lack of knowledge. What kind of knowledge? The knowledge of the Lord because we've rejected the knowledge of the Lord.

We think we're smart, but we're being destroyed. We have seen the destruction of so many things in our culture today because of a lack of knowledge. We've seen the destruction of the home. We've seen the destruction of marriage. We've seen the destruction of parenting. We've seen the destruction of education.

We've seen people destroying life itself in things like abortion and other kinds, and rampant murder. And on, and on, and on. And why? Because people lack knowledge. We are destroyed for lack of knowledge. You cannot overestimate the knowledge of God. Let me show you on the screen a Proverb from chapter 9. It says:

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Proverbs 9:19 (NIV84)

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

And that means true understanding. You want real knowledge? Knowledge of the Holy One? Knowledge of God, right? One of the books that I read when I first gave my life to the Lord, well, when I first started walking with the Lord, because I've told you before, I gave my life to the Lord at age about 15, but I kind of took it back.

I mean, I accepted his salvation. I didn't really start walking with him till I was 25, 24, 25, something like that, took almost 10 years. That's just, that's me, that's the way I roll. Anyway, the one of the very first books I was given and started to read was by A.W. Tozer, a book called "Knowledge of the Holy" and it's a

wonderful book, and it was at the time as a new believer, it was fairly heavy reading.

I've come to love Tozer in pretty much all of his works, but he makes a statement in that book, which he calls “Knowledge of the Holy” and he says this, on the screen.

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"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. (In other words, it's not how you look, how much you weigh, how long your hair is, what color it is, what color your skin is. He says:) The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its faith, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no faith has ever been greater than its idea of God. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most ominous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.” - A.W. Tozer • Knowledge of the Holy

I love that quote because it just encapsulates this idea of the importance of having a knowledge of the Holy, knowledge of the Holy One. God has revealed Himself to us in His word and yet we are being destroyed. Many people, our culture, our society is literally falling apart all around us for a lack of knowledge. Isn't that amazing? It really is.

So we go on here now look with me in verse 7, it says:

7 *“The more they increased,* (in other words, the more blessings and abundance they were given) *the more they sinned against me;* (And isn't that true? He says) *I will change their glory* (or if you will, their abundance) *into shame.” (ESV)*

Isn't that something? What is it about human nature? The more blessings we receive from God, the more we seem to take it all for granted and go our own way. And what is it that drives us back to God? Is it blessings usually? No. It's hardship, isn't it? It's when we go through some kind of a hard situation or situations, we're pretty incredible people.

Verse 8, He says:

8 "They feed on the sin of my people; (He's talking again about his leaders) *they are greedy for their iniquity.*

9 And it shall be like people, like priest; I will punish them for their ways and repay them for their deeds." (ESV)

This is that trickle down judgment. It starts with the leaders, but it goes down to the people because they are following in that example, He says:

10 "They shall eat, but not be satisfied; they shall play the whore,…" (ESV)

And that's talking about spiritual prostitution okay? Spiritual prostitution. It means worshiping other gods, worshiping other dynamics in life. He says, and this is interesting:

10 "… but they will not multiply, …" (ESV)

So he's using a sexual idea there of having physical relations but bearing no children. In other words, the fruit of that relationship will not come forth, okay? Why?

10 "…because they have forsaken the Lord to cherish

11 whoredom, wine, and new wine, (look at this) *which take away the understanding." (ESV)*

Now that may sound interesting, it's actually a scientific statement. Alcohol takes away understanding, takes away your ability to think clearly. We knew that. It's not a big, it's not a heavy duty, it's like, whoa!, we hadn't gotten around to thinking about that one. No, but it's a scientific statement nonetheless. It clouds the mind.

When the Bible talks about sobriety or sober mindedness, it's not just talking about not being drunk, it's talking about maintaining the ability to think clearly.

Now, drunkenness interferes with your ability to think clearly. There's no question about that and that by the way, that fog will continue long after a person has stopped drinking. We've seen this as well. There is a period of

sobriety that is required of someone, a protracted period of sobriety before the brain begins to function normally again.

And I just like the way the Bible puts it, it takes away understanding, it literally robs you of understanding.

Verse 12, He says:

12 "My people inquire of a piece of wood,…" (ESV)

And He's referring there to the fact that they take wood and they carve it into idols and they fashion it into images of their pagan gods.

And He says:

12 "… and their walking staff gives them oracles. For a spirit of whoredom (or prostitution, again, that being spiritual prostitution or harlotry) *has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the whore.*

13 They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains…" (ESV)

See, pagans believed that the higher you got up in elevation, the closer you were to the god, and so they would climb up onto mountains and those practices even made their way into Israel in the worship of Yahweh.

You'll remember that they would, even some of the good prophets and some of the good kings would actually go up to the high places to worship. Well, that was a pagan thing and God didn't bug him about it too much as long as they were really worshiping Him, there. He didn't correct them right away, even though it was a pagan thought to do it because they were at least worshiping the one true God.

But later on as their, as the revelation of God increased, God judged them for not destroying the high places. In fact, you'll read, if you read through the Kings, and you know how at the end of it, the life of every king, it'll kind of give us synopsis of his life and it'll say, well, he was a pretty good king, he did this, he did that, but he didn't remove the high places. But that might be one of the comments. And that's because eventually God made it very clear that the high places were paganistic thinking and He wanted them removed. He didn't want His people doing that or going there. These, this is what they do, and that's why He says:

13 "They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the whore, and your brides commit adultery." (ESV)

And I want you to just be reminded every time we see those words, it's talking about spiritual adultery, worshiping other gods, okay? Verse 14. But look what He says here, He says, even though your daughters do this:

14 "I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with prostitutes and sacrifice with cult prostitutes, and a people without understanding shall come to ruin." (ESV)

And this is a very interesting statement. God is saying here that He's not going to single out the women for what they're doing. And the reason is because they've been encouraged by the men who have not only encouraged the women to sin, but have participated in that sin. And so God is saying here, I'm not going to, I'm not going to pinpoint the women when in fact the men are behind this thing.

Verse 15 says:

15 "Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty. Enter not into Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven, and swear not, "As the Lord lives."" (ESV)

And then He says this, this is very interesting,

16 "Like a stubborn heifer, Israel is stubborn;…" (ESV)

Now, I want to stop you there because in the course of these chapters that we're going to look at tonight, God's going to do this. And I don't know how many of you work with heifers or cows of all, or any kind of farm animal of any kind. But you would probably read this and you would say, oh yeah, I know what that's about, because you've done that.

And that's why God is using these types, these word pictures, because they were commonly understood by the people of the day, they knew what a stubborn heifer was like. They knew what it was like to try to get a stubborn animal from point A to point B or whatever the case might be.

And so He's using the word pictures Now, if He was speaking to people today, as God is still speaking today, He's not going to use types and word pictures that are completely beyond us. I mean, they're outside of our realm of what we deal with on a day-to-day basis.

But this is what they were dealing with. And He says that Israel is like a stubborn heifer, and He says:

16 "...can the Lord now feed them like a lamb in a broad pasture?" (ESV)

What He's saying here is kind of interesting. He says you've become rebellious and defiant, so can I treat you well? Can I take you out to a broad and lush and prosperous pasture and just let you graze there? No, I can't because you're a rebellious, you're a rebellious people. So I'm going to have to hem you in. I'm going to have to pen you in. You know when you've got an animal that won't behave or it runs off or something like that, you keep it tied up or you put it in a pen so it can't get away, right.

And that's what God is saying here to Israel. And this is a statement that frankly, any parent should instantly understand because have you ever noticed? Sue and I've raised 4 kids and all the parents here in this room know that children have a way of dictating how we parent them. The kid actually dictates how we parent them. If a child is compliant and responsive to the leadership of the parent, they're going to find that child is going to find themselves being given freedom and opportunity to express their life, their heart, their desires.

But if a child is rebellious and defiant, that child is going to find their opportunities few and their freedom's fewer. They've dictated the terms. Children often dictate the terms of how they're going to be treated by their parents. And then, and the kids are kind of like, well, why don't you treat, my brother the same way? Because he's different. You guys dictate your own terms, and that's what God is saying to Israel.

You have dictated, can I treat you, He says, like a lamb in a broad abundant pasture where I can just let you roam free and not worry about you? Can I treat you that way? No, I can't because you've become rebellious. It's kind of interesting, isn't it? God's speaking like a parent. He says in the last 3 verses of the chapter.

17 "Ephraim is joined to idols;..." (ESV)

And by the way, Ephraim was the largest tribe of the northern Kingdom of Israel and that's why God will at times refer to Israel as Ephraim.

17 "Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone.

18 When their drink is gone, they give themselves to whoring; their rulers dearly love shame.

19 A wind has wrapped them in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices." (ESV)

Chapter 5.

1 "Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor.

2 And the revolters (or if you will, the rebels) *have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them.*

3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled.

4 Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and (and look at this) *they know not the LORD." (ESV)*

Notice how He starts in verse 3 by saying, *"I know Ephraim"* and He says, *"Israel is not hidden from me"*. That's another way of saying, I know Israel, but what does He say about them? They don't know me, I know my people, but they don't know me.

Verse 5:

5 "The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them." (ESV)

Albeit in Judah's case, many years later. Verse 6:

6 "With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them.

7 They have dealt faithlessly with the Lord; for they have borne alien children. (children that don't know the Lord in other words) *Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields." (ESV)*

New moon celebrations were connected at one time with a rejoicing. A time of harvest and plenty and abundance. But now God is telling them, because those new moon celebrations have been connected with pagan worship and rituals in idolatry, He says now that those very festivals and celebrations that were once a joy would now devour them along with their fields. So He says:

8 "Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin!" (ESV)

We're not sure what that statement means. It is believed that "*we follow you O Benjamin*" was probably a well-known war cry and which is now being expressed ironically in the sense of, Benjamin is now leading them into judgment.

9 "Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.

10 The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water." (ESV)

This is one of the rare times when God speaks to the southern Kingdom of Judah.

11 "Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth.

12 But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah." (ESV)

Moth and dry rot were things that ate away at your belongings.

13 "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound." (ESV)

Stop there for just a moment. What He's talking about here, this sickness and wound that he's referring to are metaphors for the hardships that Israel and Judah suffered because of their enemies. But God is saying that when your

enemies came against you and they made life difficult for you, instead of realizing that I was disciplining you, you went to other kings to get help, you went to other kings to find reprieve.

And He says, God is saying instead of turning to me, you went to the world. Do you think Christians do that today? Do Christians do that today? Do we turn to the world instead of turning to the Lord? Oh, all the time, all the time. This word could be spoken to believers in the body of Christ today, just like it is spoken to Israel, but God says Assyria is not going to be able to help you.

Verse 14:

14 "For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.

15 I will return again to my place, (look at this) *until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me." (ESV)*

And once again, we come back to the same thing we talked about earlier. This, crazy sort of a thing about we people, we humans, and what it takes for us to seek the Lord. What does it take? What does it take for you to start seeking the Lord? Here, He is talking about Israel and He says, I'm going to return to my place, I'm not going to be among them.

I'm not going to, until they learn to acknowledge their sin and they turn to me and they come back to me and they acknowledge their guilt and they begin to seek the Lord. Isn't it interesting that when we go through those kind of difficult times, suddenly we become very earnest about seeking the Lord? It's the same thing with Israel.

Chapter 6. Chapter 6 and 7 kind of flow into one another, you'll see that as we go and I want you to notice here, these first 3 verses of the chapter, because they're a single expression, but they're not just a single expression, they're such a good single expression.

Because this seems to be a prayer of Hosea and I think that's what's going on. Hosea is offering up a prayer. In the midst, he's pausing for a moment in the midst of the prophetic insight and revelation that he's being given, and he stops to pray for Israel. And I want you to see his prayer because it's quite something.

He says:

[1] "Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

[2] After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

[3] Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains (your Bible may say the latter rains) *that water the earth."*

And what I really like about these verses and what I believe is Hosea's prayer is they express a faith and a trust in God, even in the midst of his disciplinary actions. And that's what I like. It's maturity on our part to recognize the love of God, even when being corrected. It is maturity.

It is immaturity, in the midst of being corrected to doubt the love of God. And I hear it all the time, and I'm sure you do too. You've probably been there. God, you don't like me. That's what children say when you discipline them. "You don't love me", it's called emotional manipulation, but it's childish.

When a child grows and matures, he or she begins to understand that I was disciplined for my good, right? My parents might not have done a perfect job of it by any stretch, but they did it because they loved me and they did it because they wanted me to turn out better than what they saw me heading toward.

But this whole idea of recognizing the love of God, even when you're being corrected and correction, by the way, correction can sometimes come in the form, every parent knows this, of disapproval. Parents, have you ever disapproved of anything your kids did? Oh, good grief. Are you kidding me, right? You have every once in a while a parent disapproves of something their child is doing. What is the world called disapproval today? "Hate speech" and it's childish, it's childish. When somebody makes a comment on social media or somewhere else about how a particular moral or particular behavior is morally wrong. Eventually, and usually it doesn't take very long. Somebody's going to come out and say something like, well, I just believe God loves all of his children. People, that's childish.

Of course he loves all his children. Didn't we settle that at the cross? Wasn't that settled at the cross? Wasn't that settled in John 3:16: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son,…"*. Okay, let's not even go there. It is a very childish thing to say, I think God loves everybody.

Of course, He loves everybody. Just like a parent loves their child and at times has to disapprove. I don't approve of your behavior, but I still love you and I would lay down my life for you, but I disapprove. I don't know why the world can't understand that, just can't get it. Any word of disapproval on your part toward any behavior of the world is hate speech. Doesn't matter if you love the person or not, it really is pretty incredible.

So, we're not going to go there, and we're not going to, I'm not going to put up with those comments either. I mean, I'm not going to get angry and get weird and obnoxious about it. But when somebody makes that statement, it's like, now just hold on a minute, did your parents ever disapprove of anything you ever did as a child?

Now as an adult, don't you understand that it was because they loved you? So why in the world would you think of God any differently? Let me show you this passage for Proverbs chapter 3, you guys know it. It's quoted also in Hebrews.

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Proverbs 3:11-12 (ESV)

My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, (that means disapproval) for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

That's what Hosea is saying in this prayer, in these first few verses of this chapter. "God, you love us," Let's respond to His love. Yes, He has wounded us, but if we turn to Him, He'll bind up that wound. He wounded us to get our attention. It's like when you spank a child, and even that, the world says is an act of hatred, the Bible says it's an act of love. Did you know that? The Bible calls punishment an act of love?

In fact, it says, if you hate your child, leave them alone. We should expect the world to get say the opposite of what the Bible teaches, I mean, that's what I expect.

All right, let's go on. Now the Lord continues speaking to Israel. Verse 4:

4 "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, (it disappears quickly) *like the dew that goes early away.*

5 Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.

6 For I desire steadfast love (and again, that can be translated mercy) *and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." (ESV)*

If that statement seems familiar, it is because Jesus quoted Hosea 2 times, 2 different occasions, both recorded in the book of Matthew. Let me show them to you first Matthew chapter 9, He says:

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Matthew 9:10-13 (ESV)

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners (that means notorious sinners) came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' (there's the quote from Hosea right there) *For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."*

Now stop there for just a minute. Somebody might actually look at this passage and say, see, Jesus loves sinners, why don't you love sinners? Because we were just talking about how they like to look at any disapproval in His hate language. But did you notice Jesus called them sick? Did you catch that? They're asking Him why He's there. He goes because they're sick and they need a doctor. That's not hate language, that's just reality, okay. So don't let anybody take that passage and use it as a club to beat you over the head.

The other place where Jesus did it is in Matthew chapter 12 and here's Him speaking. He says:

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Matthew 12:7-8 (ESV)

"And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."

You guys probably know what that's all about. But twice, twice, Jesus quoted this very verse in Hosea. If you would've just understood, isn't it interesting? These religious leaders, they knew the scriptures, but they didn't understand how to apply it. They knew what the words, when he quoted the word, they weren't going, where's it say that? They knew exactly where that was. Oh, that's in Hosea, I remember that. But they didn't get it, they didn't get the meaning, they didn't bring the application into life.

Verse 7.

7 "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

8 Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood.

9 As robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests band together; they murder on the way to Shechem; they commit villainy.

10 In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim's whoredom is there; Israel is defiled." (ESV)

And as we read verse 11, you're going to see how it just morphs. It goes right into the next chapter. It says in verse 11:

11 "For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed." (ESV)

And by the way, there's a difference of opinion as to whether or not this harvest refers to a negative or a positive thing.

But He goes on to say:

11 "When I restore the fortunes of my people,

(Hosea 7 now)

1 when I would heal Israel, the iniquity of Ephraim is revealed, and the evil deeds of Samaria, (remember, Samaria was the capital city of Israel, the

northern Kingdom) *for they deal falsely; the thief breaks in, and the bandits raid outside." (ESV)*

And what the Lord seems to be saying here in these really kind of challenging couple of verses, the last verse of the previous chapter and in this verse is that even when I heal Israel, their hearts aren't drawn to me, and all it does is just reveal even more they're sinful ways, they become more pronounced.

Verse 2:

2 "But they do not consider that I remember all their evil. Now their deeds surround them; they are before my face." (ESV)

God says their sins are literally before his face. Now I want you to stop there for just a moment and think about that. He's telling Israel their sins are remembered. Let me ask you a question, are your sins remembered? No, they are not.

That, my dear brothers and sisters in Jesus is a promise and how different this is when we come and repent and lay hold of what Jesus did for us at the cross. Let me show you first, I love, one of my favorite verses in the Bible is 1 John 1:9, I quote it all the time to people:

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1 John 1:9 (ESV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Now, let me ask you a question. Does he forget? Look what he said in Jeremiah chapter 31. I love this. He says:

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Jeremiah 31:34b (ESV)

"For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

I'll take that, I'll take that over what Israel's going through here. Because there was no repentance on their part. If they would've repented, that would've, God would've forgiven them. So you can see that it's a very different sort of a situation. Verse 3:

[3] *"By their evil they make the king glad, and the princes by their treachery.*

[4] *They are all adulterers; they are like a heated oven whose baker ceases to stir the fire, from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened." (ESV)*

And this is obviously another word picture. I, we don't bake bread in ovens that are heated, like that. But, he's making some interesting illustrations here. An oven that baker ceases to stir the fire.

I mean, it sounds like, it kind of sounds like they're half baked. I mean, to use kind of a modern, sort of a statement, but He goes on to say:

[5] *"On the day of our king,* (and that refers to some kind of a celebration in honor of the king) *the princes became sick with the heat of wine; he stretched out his hand with mockers.*

[6] *For with hearts like an oven* (there it is again, another word, picture of an oven) *they approach their intrigue;…" (ESV)*

Now here he is referring to an oven that's smoldering and hot and it probably refers to the heat of lust to commit their spiritual adultery. He says:

[6] *"…all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire.*

[7] *All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen, and none of them* (and He says, none of them) *calls upon me." (ESV)*

Look what else he says about Ephraim in verse 8. He says:

[8] *"Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples;…" (ESV)*

What He's saying is, Ephraim my people, has mixed themselves in with the people of the world. He's talking about the Canaanites, their neighbors, their neighboring countries and people groups that were into idolatry and pagan rituals and so on and so forth. And He says, my people have joined with them, He says, they've mixed with them.

Now, this has long been an issue even for Christians today. It's like, how much do I mix with the world? I don't want to mix it. And people get really bothered by this, and they even going to work becomes this very difficult sort of a thing. I had a guy write to me a note just today who said that he is a tutor. He's like a

high school tutor, and he go, he doesn't live in our country, he lives in another nation.

And he goes from house to house and he tutors people in their homes. And he said, in this one home where I'm tutoring this kid, they put me in this little room where they also have a shrine to a pagan god. And he says, while I'm there, the mother comes in and she lights candles and kind of does these prayers.

And he's like, I'm kind of creeped out those, that's kind of my words. But he was kind of creeped up by the whole thing and he was like, what should I do about that? What should I do? Well, I understand. We don't want to, I basically wrote him back and I said, listen, just because this woman is worshiping or praying to a deity other than the Lord God, and worshiping another god in front of you, doesn't mean that's the only place it happens.

Everywhere we go, people are worshiping other gods, okay? At the store, at the theater, at the ballgame, doesn't matter, doesn't matter where you go, people are worshiping other gods, all the time. You with me? So I basically told him, hey, it doesn't affect you, if she comes in and lights her candles and says her prayers, it doesn't affect you.

You're a believer in Jesus, just… . Mixing with other people is when we take on what they're doing. And it's the same thing when we take on the things that the world worships, like beauty, and money, and sex, and pleasure, and all the other things that the world worships, youth, right? They run after those things.

We are around these people all day long and you can't help but be around them. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, and he told them at one point not to mix with the world, and they thought he meant they not, they shouldn't spend any time around anybody who wasn't a believer. So he had to write them back and say, oh, no, you misunderstood me. That's not what I meant. I wasn't saying that, if that were the case, you'd have to leave this world.

He says I'm telling you that I don't want you to hang around, and mix with people who claim to be believers, but are actually living in immorality.

So that's the point, the point is truly mixing lifestyle, what you do day to day, what you long for. Does the Lord ever catch you in your longings? Does he ever catch you with worldly longings?

I know you're sitting there just looking at me and nobody wants to acknowledge it. I'll just say he catches me in my worldly longings, pretty regularly. Paul, that's a worldly thing, yeah, you're right, Lord.

And it doesn't mean that it's necessarily wrong, and that's not to long for it and to run after it, you see. Money is one of those things that we have to pay our bills. But God says, don't love it, you can't love me and money at the same time. Doesn't mean you're not, you're going to give up money. You've got to have it, and God will provide it, He just doesn't want it to harm you. That's the point.

So when He says Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples, you can see what He's saying. He's talking about a true coming together where they're sharing in an intimate sort of a spiritual way. And here's another interesting picture.

8 "Ephraim is a cake not turned." (ESV)

Here we come back to that kind of half-baked picture, like burned on the one side and raw on the other or something like that. Verse 9:

9 "Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not; gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not.

10 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; (that's the second time He said that) *yet they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him, for all this.*

11 Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria.

12 As they go, I will spread over them my net; I will bring them down like birds of the heavens; I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation." (ESV)

And that means by the prophets, according to the word of the prophets.

13 "Woe to them, for they have strayed from me! Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me." (ESV)

And look at this, I think verse 14 is very important.

14 "They do not cry to me from the heart, …" (ESV)

Notice God isn't saying that they don't cry. He says, they don't cry to me from the heart, okay? He says, but they do wail.

14 "… but they wail upon their beds; for grain and wine they gash themselves;…" (ESV)

Did you catch that? *"…they gash themselves;"* That was a pagan ritual. They would literally cut themselves until blood flowed because they believed it would get the attention of the pagan deities. He says:

14 "… they rebel against me.

15 "Although I trained and strengthened their arms, yet they devise evil against me.

16 They return, but not upward;…" (ESV)

In other words, the idea there is they return for help but not to God.

16 "…they are like a treacherous bow; their princes shall fall by the sword because of the insolence of their tongue. This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt." (ESV)

Let me end with one thought here, this statement that He makes here of people coming to for help but not coming to God or returning, but not returning to God. This idea of people coming for help but not wanting God is one of the biggest challenges that churches face when it comes to benevolence, and I don't know if you're aware of that word, how we use it in the church. Benevolence has its own, I mean, it just means "kindness". But we use the word benevolence in the church to refer to helping people with food, clothing, rent, vehicle repair, a tank of gas, you name it.

And people come a lot. And we're not talking about people that attend our church. People who attend our church regularly, you can expect to get help, pretty much without question. Our goal and our aim is to always take care of the people you know, who are part of the family here.

It's a challenge when people come to the church for help, who are desiring us to help, but they have absolutely no desire for anything related to God. I'm not saying we shouldn't help them. I'm not saying we don't help them. I'm just saying it creates a very huge challenge. It makes it very hard to know how to respond.

It's, and what happens is when it comes to benevolence ministry, which is what we call it, there's a great need for discernment. You got to, people will ask, sometimes other pastors, when they start a church, they'll say, how do you guys do benevolence? How do you work benevolence? I'd just love to know how you guys do it. There's no manual.

It's like, I, once, I once got a manual from another church on how to do benevolence. And I thought it was really cool for a while, and then I trashed it because I realized every situation is unique and you have to pray because God may want you to help one but not another.

The help that you give to this person might actually end up hurting them, but you don't know that, but God knows it. So it's very challenging and there is great need for spiritual discernment because again, most people are coming, but they're not coming for God, they don't want God, they don't want you to talk to them about God. In fact, they might politely listen for a minute or two, but that's all.

I had a guy, years and years ago say that he was hungry and needed food. He was in a local motel. So we, I had, I went home and had Sue cook him up a meal, it was really early in the days of the church. We didn't have hardly 2 nickels to rubbed together. So Sue made him a hot meal and we put it in one of those Styrofoam containers, with a cover and I took it down to his room. I knocked on the door and the guy opened the door. He had the phone under his, on his shoulder. He opened the door, grabbed it, closed the door, did not say a word. I was like, God bless you. It happens, what are you going to do? Well, it's challenging, and this is what God is saying to Israel.

You cry, but you don't cry to me. You come, but you don't come to me. You return, but you don't return upward. So we're going to stop there. We got through 4 chapters: 4, 5, 6, 7. Yeah, 4 chapters, good. Praise the Lord.

All right, let's close in prayer. Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you, Lord, for the book Hosea. Thank you for the insights we gained from it. Thank you, Lord, for your mercy and your grace and thank you, Lord, for the cross that we are celebrating this week, whereby our sin has been paid by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Thank you, Lord, for the promise that goes along with that, that when we receive Christ as our savior, our sins are not only forgiven, but that you'll remember them no more. Forgive us for the times that we forget that and when the enemy tries to get us to remember our sins, or he calls attention to our past

sins. Forgive us, Lord, for not standing fast on the promise of your Word, that you will remember our sins no more. It is finished. We thank you and praise you, Lord. Continue to be with us as we go from this place in Jesus' precious name, amen.