

REPENTANCE AND RESTORATION | HOSEA 12:14-14:9

A PLEA TO RETURN TO THE LORD | BY LUKE THORNE

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter, we saw God's heart poured out to complacent Judah. He called out their sin and warned them of the consequences of remaining complacent towards God. And while complacency in our spiritual walk is deadly, it often leads further into outright turning away from God.

In this sermon, we will be looking at the past part of Hosea. It is the big conclusion and main thrust of the prophet's ministry, and the message is painfully clear if not easily accepted: repent and be restored or do not repent and be destroyed, and this is the same message as the rest of the scriptures.

There is a lot to cover today, so instead of going verse by verse, let us examine the two chapters side-by-side. First, we will look at each of the warnings, sins, and judgments, and contrast each with a part of the plea to repentance from the Lord.

A SIN AND A PLEA

Hosea 12:2-14 (NET¹)

¹⁴But Ephraim bitterly provoked him to anger; so he will hold him accountable for the blood he has shed, his Lord will repay him for the contempt he has shown.

As we discussed in the last sermon, the tone of God's rebuke to Ephraim could not be more different than his rebuke of Judah.² The main difference is this: Judah continued to worship the LORD, though out of complacency instead of conviction; Ephraim had long abandoned YHWH for idol worship and slavery to his enemies. Both were offenses to the Lord of Lords, their protector and provider, but of the two, Ephraim's sin demanded a harsher course correction.

An important note, the word translated "bitterly" here is written in an absolute form. So really, what Hosea's oracle is suggesting is that Ephraim's transgression is the most bitter provocation of God's anger. Does this mean most bitter between the two nations or of all time? The Apostle Paul tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."³

Regardless, their idolatry and corruption would result in them being held under bloodguilt and repaid for the contempt of the LORD in like kind. And like it or not, this is the state of each and every soul who stands in rebellion to God: for them lies no redemption of bloodguilt by the blood of Christ, but only "a fearful expectation of judgment."⁴

But before we get ahead of ourselves, let us examine some of the summary specifics of their bitter provocation.

A PLEA TO REPENT

Hosea 14:1

¹Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for your sin has been your downfall!

The call to repentance rings out clear and pure. Your sins have destroyed you; abide no longer in them but return to God! The ultimatum is clear: repent or be destroyed⁵. This call is great news for those of the remnant that hid themselves in God's mercy, but it is terrible news to everyone who cries, "my will be done!"

Note the ownership of their destruction. While it comes at the hand of God, it's cause (and blame) lie squarely on the perpetrator. Like a court sentencing, the judge hands down the sentence, but you could no more blame the judge than anyone else for the consequences of the crime.

¹ All references are from the New English Translation unless otherwise marked.

² For comparison, see Hosea 12:2

³ Romans 3:23

⁴ Hebrews 10:27

⁵ See Revelation 2:16

But before any of us Gentile's breathe a sigh of relief, believing that this expectation of repentance is only for Israel, remember that the age of Christ has opened the means of grace (and necessity of repentance) to all mankind:

Acts 17:30

30Therefore, although God has overlooked such times of ignorance, he now commands all people everywhere to repent...

From the beginning of Jesus' ministry⁶ to the end, he preached the gospel of repentance. His mission was a plea to all people everywhere that the kingdom of God had come and none outside of that kingdom would receive mercy from God, but all were graciously invited in.

"The gospel—the good news—is that the rule of God has arrived in Jesus to save sinners before it arrives at his second coming in judgment. So the demand to repent is based on the gracious offer that is present to forgive, and on the gracious warning that someday those who refuse the offer will perish in God's judgment....This is the demand of Jesus to every soul: Repent. Be changed deep within."⁷

In other words, be born again. You might ask, as Nicodemus asked, "How can I make myself born again?" And the answer is, you cannot. Sorry, no amount of willpower or effort will get you there. But there is something that can.

RETURN TO THE LORD

Hosea 13:4-6

4But I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Therefore, you must not acknowledge any God but me; except me there is no Savior.

5I cared for you in the wilderness, in the dry desert where no water was.

6When they were fed, they became satisfied; when they were satisfied, they became proud; as a result, they forgot me!

YHWH reminds his children of who he is. How often have you opened the Bible without expectation of anything profound, only to be reminded, in shock and delight, of his amazing faithfulness? What does that experience create in you? I am often taken aback by how short-sighted I can become; so easily forgetting the true weight of God's grace in yesterday's self.

Thank you LORD for maintaining a hunger within me; a lack of satisfaction that spurns me on to experience more of who you are! Do not let me become hardened to your gracious provisions, lest I need to be humbled again as Israel was.

JEALOUS REPRISAL

Hosea 13:7-9

7So I will pounce on them like a lion; like a leopard I will lurk by the path.

8I will attack them like a bear robbed of her cubs— I will rip open their chests. I will devour them there like a lion— like a wild animal would tear them apart.

9I will destroy you, O Israel! Who is there to help you?

But because even in sight of the LORD's past favor they rebelled, he would break them to pieces. Disobedience out of ignorance is one thing, disobedience in sight of your God, fully knowing what you do is wrong, is another. Those of you who have had small children know the fury that can arise in your hearts (thank the LORD for his out-poured temperance) when your child, with eyes locked to yours, intentionally disobeys your word.

And this is what Israel was doing with God. Eyes locked with God (via the prophets and the Law), they put their hand where it was forbidden, but on a totally different scale than the toddler. The severity of their disobedience was so bad in God's eyes, it could only be paid for with blood⁸.

⁶ See Matthew 4:17

⁷ Piper, J. (4-19-2006) from <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/thoughts-on-jesus-demand-to-repent>

⁸ See Leviticus 17:11, Romans 6:23, Hebrews 9:22

Now, we might comfort ourselves with believing that we are not so bad as the rebellious Israelites. Indeed, when we read Jesus' words in Luke chapter 13, we might come to the conclusion that bad things happen to decent people. Perhaps the Hosea fellow was being a bit dramatic with his prophecies of Israel's fall?

In Luke 13, Jesus is having a conversation with Jews who thought that the Galileans executed by Pilate and the workers who died in the Tower of Siloam collapse were especially evil in God's eyes. Not once but twice, our Lord Jesus says, "No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."⁹

We are tempted to think that he is saying that these events have nothing to do with their bloodguilt; that is, bad things happen to good people. But what is Jesus saying? He says, "There are no good people! Everyone deserves what happened to these men."

WHO WILL SAVE YOU FROM MY HAND?

Hosea 13:10-11

¹⁰Where then is your king, that he may save you in all your cities? Where are your rulers for whom you asked, saying, "Give me a king and princes"?

¹¹I granted you a king in my anger, and I will take him away in my wrath!

Ah, but the defense comes. Israel says, "we have an advocate; a protector from God's justice." Mommy! The toddler cries as the father comes to deliver punishment. They thought they could avoid the consequences of their brazen idolatry by reliance in earthly power and might.

Their father would take away even that. They would be left with nothing; not even a leader to blame for their Godlessness. And yet, the Father's appeal to repentance and restoration comes.

I AM SHALL SAVE YOU

Hosea 14:2-3

²Return to the Lord and repent! Say to him: "Completely forgive our iniquity; accept our penitential prayer, that we may offer the praise of our lips as sacrificial bulls.

³Assyria cannot save us; we will not ride warhorses. We will never again say, 'Our gods' to what our own hands have made. For only you will show compassion to Orphan Israel!"

In spite of the judgment they deserve, he pleads with them to repent. He cries out for them to turn away from their sin and turn towards Jesus. The same call is made to each and every one of us. The good news is that God has made a way for all men to be reconciled with him. Though most refuse to take it, many have and are and will take hold of the hope found in YHWH our savior¹⁰. Hallelujah!

Ezekiel 33:14, 16 (ESV)

¹⁴Again, though I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' yet if he turns from his sin and does what is just and right...

¹⁶None of the sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he shall surely live.

THE CUP OF WRATH

Hosea 13:12-13

¹²The punishment of Ephraim has been decreed; his punishment is being stored up for the future.

¹³The labor pains of a woman will overtake him, but the baby will lack wisdom; when the time arrives, he will not come out of the womb!

As we discussed in Hosea chapter 11, God's mercy has resulted in the storing up of his wrath and judgment on the world.

⁹ Luke 13:3 and 13:5

¹⁰ See Isaiah 43:11, Hosea 13:4, Jude 25

Isaiah 51:17 (ESV)

¹⁷Wake yourself, wake yourself, stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering.

Indeed, in each of our lives, we are free to live as we choose, however the dire consequences of our hearts and actions awaits us in death. It is then that the cup of wrath, filled to the brim, will be drunk.

For each person on this world, it will either be wrath leading to eternal damnation and separation from God's love, or it will be drunk by Christ on our behalf. The only difference is in whom we have faith in. Do you dedicate your life in trust to the Christ? If so, he has already drank your cup to the dregs¹¹.

OH DEATH, BRING ON YOUR STING?

Hosea 13:14

¹⁴Will I deliver them from the power of Sheol? No, I will not! Will I redeem them from death? No, I will not! O Death, bring on your plagues! O Sheol, bring on your destruction! My eyes will not show any compassion!

Often, the Apostles of the new covenant (even Jesus himself) will quote a verse and give it a new context and meaning. Perhaps this passage rings a bell, though the tone of it is very different than the one we are familiar with. Here, God is declaring his unwillingness to take the cup of wrath from his unfaithful bride.

"The sting of death is sin,"¹² and he will not remove the stinger from a person hellbent on pushing further into the thorns of unrighteousness. However, for those who put their trust in Christ for victory over death, the meaning of this proclamation flips.

1 Corinthians 15:54–57

⁵⁴Now when this perishable puts on the imperishable, and this mortal puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will happen, "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

⁵⁶The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

⁵⁷But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!

And so, by taking hold of the promise by faith, Jew and Gentile alike¹³ are made a new creation!

ANGER TURNED TO SALVATION

Hosea 14:4

⁴"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger will turn away from them.

What can I say but, "wow!" Does this amaze you? It should. Stop with me for a moment to consider the grace offered freely to us. God did not give us a new set of "thou shalt's" to pay back our sin debt. He didn't say "try harder!" He said, "28Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke on you and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" Matthew 11:28–29.

Isaiah 51:21–22 (ESV)

²¹Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine:

²²Thus says your Lord, the Lord, your God who pleads the cause of his people: "Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more..."

¹¹ **Mark 14:36** ³⁶He said, "Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

¹² 1 Corinthians 15:56

¹³ See Acts 10:34-35

DROUGHT AND THE PROMISE OF RAIN

The final section of God's statement to his unfaithful bride turns to the metaphor of the barren and broken land they will become in judgment, and the flourishing paradise they can become in repentance and restoration.

BARREN AND BROKEN

Hosea 13:15-16

¹⁵Even though he flourishes like a reed plant, a scorching east wind will come, a wind from the Lord rising up from the desert. As a result, his spring will dry up; his well will become dry. That wind will spoil all his delightful foods in the containers in his storehouse.

¹⁶Samaria will be held guilty, because she rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword, their infants will be dashed to the ground— their pregnant women will be ripped open.

We often forget that the kindness of God's blessing in our lives is meant to draw us to repentance.¹⁴ If, however, we presume upon that kindness, he will rob us of its joy and dash our clever little plans to pieces.

Have you been blessed with success in this world? Have you been blessed with a spouse and beautiful children? Have you been blessed with financial stability? Have you been blessed with beautiful friendships? How much of God's goodness has shown down on your life? These things are a call to turn away from iniquity and turn towards God. If, however, we seek these things for their own sake, we become futile in our thinking, exchanging the glory of God for immaterial treasures.¹⁵

Be warned then, we must consider in our hearts where these blessings stand in relation to Jesus. Regard the giver and cherish him above all gifts. For he is willing and able to remove those things if they become idolatry in the way of your reconciliation to him.

THE PROMISE OF RAIN

Hosea 14:5-7

⁵I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily, he will send down his roots like a cedar of Lebanon.

⁶His young shoots will grow; his splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon.

⁷People will reside again in his shade; they will plant and harvest grain in abundance. They will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon.

CONCLUSION

Hosea 14:9

⁹Who is wise? Let him discern these things! Who is discerning? Let him understand them! For the ways of the Lord are right; the godly walk in them, but in them the rebellious stumble.

The gospel of repentance is a touchy subject. Many well-meaning Christians don't believe we ought to preach repentance "because 1- It's not needed 2- It adds works to the gospel 3- It's a stumbling block. 4- the [Holy Spirit] will do it."

- **It is absolutely necessary;** Jesus makes that abundantly clear. From the beginning of his earthly ministry to the end, he preached it as *foundational* to being born again:
 - **The beginning of his ministry:** ¹⁷From that time Jesus began to preach this message: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" Matthew 4:17.
 - **His commission to the disciples at the end:** ⁴⁷...and repentance *for* the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in [Jesus] name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. ⁴⁸You are witnesses of these things" Luke 24:47-48.

¹⁴ See Romans 2:4

¹⁵ See Romans 1:21-23

- **Repentance is not a work.** It is the other side of faith¹⁶. Repentance does not mean, “stop doing a thing.” It means “reorient your affections from this thing to God.” Obedience (works) will naturally follow.
 - “Therefore we must progress beyond the elementary instructions about Christ and move on to maturity, not laying this *foundation* again: repentance *from* dead works and faith *toward* God...” Hebrews 6:1.
 - “²¹...testifying to both Jews and Greeks about repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus” Acts 20:21.
- **The Holy Spirit will convict the world... through us.** We are not excused from preaching the truth because it’s *hard* for people to hear. We preach the truth in faith, knowing that the Holy Spirit *will* use us and his Word to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.¹⁷
 - “¹⁷So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” Romans 10:17 (ESV).
 - “¹⁴How are they to call on one they have not believed in? And how are they to believe in one they have not heard of? And how are they to hear without someone preaching to them?” Romans 10:14.
- **It is a stumbling block.** Indeed, the gospel of repentance and grace is the most offensive thing to a “righteous” person. But, it is a necessary stumbling block. “The rebellious stumble” on the ground of God’s way, but the repentant sinner finds only the smooth path to glory.
 - “³¹but Israel even though pursuing a law of righteousness did not attain it. ³²Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but (as if it were possible) by works. They stumbled over the stumbling stone...” Romans 9:31–32.
 - “²³...we preach about a crucified Christ, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” 1 Corinthians 1:23.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why was Ephraim receiving harsher judgment than Judah?
2. What is the most insidious form of idolatry?
3. What is the ultimatum for Israel in God’s plea?
4. What is Jesus’ message to those who condemned in Luke 13?
5. Who will drink my cup of wrath? Why?
6. What do we have victory over in Christ?
7. What is the purpose for the blessings in man’s life?
8. Is repentance necessary? Why?
9. Why is repentance a stumbling block?
10. Is there something the Holy Spirit is convicting me to repent of?

¹⁶ Faith is not a work either. See Galatians 2:16

¹⁷ See John 16:-11