

Hosea 10

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[0 : 00] When I was a child, there was a children's television network in the States, a channel that made an announcement that the best way children learn is through repetition and using things that are familiar to them to help them be educated.

So what they were going to do was they were going to take sort of normal everyday objects like, say, a bowl of fruit. And the bowl of fruit would teach children the importance of eating fruit, you know, things that are good for them.

The other thing they were going to do was since they learned through repetition, they were going to show the same show every single day of the week for one week straight.

Now, that sounds kind of good. But the truth is, I think, if we're honest, that's American laziness meeting American capitalism. Why make another show if you can just, you know, keep putting the same one out there and making money?

But if you've been tracking with our series on Hosea, we've taken kind of a long break from it. But if you were here before, you probably are going, this sounds like a lot of the same stuff coming up over and over again.

[1 : 14] And the truth is, yeah, there's a lot of the same themes that we see throughout the book of Hosea, because oftentimes we learn through repetition. And oftentimes in the case of Israel, and I would say ourselves, oftentimes we don't learn through repetition.

And if you've been coming before, you've probably noticed a lot of similar language coming throughout. And it sounds strange to our modern ears, some of the words and things that are used. But these are words and objects and ideas that Israel would have grasped very clearly.

They're a part of their everyday lives. And I want us to unpack a few of these this afternoon in our brief time together. What Hosea gets at in this passage is really the heart of Israel's problem.

And the accusation that is being made is very basic and it's very simple. It's an idolatry problem. And he hits on it in verse 1.

For you have played the whore. Now, that's not a very polite term, is it? It's not one that we would use in polite company today. But it's a clear term, isn't it?

[2 : 23] We know exactly what Hosea is talking about when we hear this term whoring. And what it looked like in Israel's day was idolatry.

Now, what is idolatry? We hear that term and we tend to think immediately of making statues that people would bow down and worship. And in our modern minds, we go, well, that's silly.

No one really does that anymore. We've kind of grown beyond that. But that's not exactly what idolatry is. What idolatry is, is making gods that you can manipulate and that you can control.

So if you want to have a child and you're having trouble with that, well, you go to the fertility god temple and you can make a sacrifice to the fertility god. If you are trying to have a good harvest that year, you go to the god of harvest and you make a sacrifice to that god.

It's very much what people were doing. And we still would go, well, that's silly. It's unsophisticated. It doesn't understand what we understand today with science and how the earth actually works.

[3 : 33] And what I would suggest to you is what modernity has done over the previous hundred years is it killed off God. It said we can understand the world.

We can understand how things work simply through science. And what postmodernity has done, it has created the ultimate idol for us, ourselves.

See, now today, who is it that can help us fulfill our deepest longings and our deepest desires?

Well, it's ourselves. We do what we want to do.

We do the things that we think are going to make us happy. And so we pursue sexuality. And if you're unhappy with your sexuality, well, you pursue some other form of sexuality.

We pursue money. And if we're not happy with one job, well, we'll just switch to another and pursue money that way. We pursue relationships.

[4 : 30] We pursue a plethora of things, don't we? See, what Israel did in a rudimentary form, in what seems like a very silly thing, we have seen fulfillment in today in the way that we've done it.

We've taken it and we've ratcheted it up. And when we hear that said, our reaction is very similar to Israel's reaction, isn't it? In verse 7, the prophet is a fool.

The man of the spirit is mad because of your great iniquity and great hatred. Now, there's a little bit of debate over what this is referring to. It's either referring to the people rejecting Hosea as a fool and saying the prophet of God is a fool.

Or it's saying that Israel has listened to other prophets, false prophets, people who came and told them exactly what they wanted to hear, who flattered them with their words.

And what Hosea then is saying is those men are going to be exposed as fools and as dangerous men. Now, however you take that verse, the message is very clear.

[5 : 45] Israel has rejected the message of God. They've rejected the message of God's prophet. And thus they have placed themselves under his wrath and his punishment is coming.

It's the difference between the truth and a lie. It's the difference between believing the truth and hearing what we want to hear. Israel went for what they wanted to hear.

And we tend to do the same. Taking these verses together, what we really see about idolatry is two things. Idolatry requires two things. First, it requires the personal delusion that we can achieve fulfillment apart from the creator God.

And the second is that it requires a ruthless propaganda campaign within our own hearts against those who claim otherwise. It requires us to believe we can achieve fulfillment apart from the creator God.

It requires us to believe that against all other evidence, against any other message. And when we break down our humanity, what we see is that there's a creator God who made us, who sustains us, and who wants us and calls us to worship and glorify him.

[7 : 00] And that's the deepest longing of our hearts. That was Israel's deepest longing. We're going to see in a moment how God called and chose them personally. And what we see from these passages is we're incapable of doing that.

We're incapable of worshiping that God. Because our hearts lead us astray. And we seek to fulfill our longings by seeking out other gods. This is idolatry.

This is sin. See, idolatry is what Israel embraced. And idolatry is what we embrace, just in a more modern form.

But the result is actually the same, isn't it? See, idolatry breeds brokenness and despair. And that's what you see throughout the rest of this passage, isn't it? The wrath of God that comes down into brokenness and despair reigns throughout the land.

See, God chose Israel. We see a beautiful picture of that in verse 10. Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. That's a lovely picture, isn't it?

[8 : 07] The picture of refreshment out in the desert, out in the wilderness, in the barren land. And God comes along and he plucks up that people, the grapes in the wilderness.

And he gives them a special relationship to him. And yet they turn aside from him. And the result is devastating, isn't it? First, he says that their children are going to bear the burden of judgment for their sin.

For the sins of the parents. Isn't that an awful thought? If you're a parent, doesn't that sound terrible? The description here is very graphic of what's going to happen to the future generations. And he says very clearly, it's because of the sin of the parents. And then what we see after that is a return to captivity.

What we can say is the reversal of Exodus. The Israelites, if you are familiar with the Bible at all, you probably know. Israel was captive in Egypt. And God comes and releases them, frees them from their captivity.

[9 : 17] He leaves them out of Egypt and takes them into and gives them the promised land. The land that they're living in now. The land that has sustained them. The land that has provided for them.

And he gives them a very simple command. Worship me. Follow me. I will be your God. You will be my people. And do not turn aside to paganism and these other gods.

But what do they do? They turn aside. And so we see three... The main point that God is getting at with his people.

Is that he looked at them as children. He called them out of slavery. He made them his people. And now they've rejected him. And the result of that is devastation.

There's a direct line drawn between suffering and the sin of God's people. There's a direct line drawn between suffering, sadness, hardship, brokenness, and idolatry.

[10:20] If you're familiar with American poetry at all, there's... One of our most famous poets is Edgar Allan Poe. He wrote the poem The Raven. And the poem The Raven is really about, in essence, idolatry and brokenness.

If you've ever read it, the author is in his study. And it's a dark night. He's surrounded by darkness and despair. He's surrounded by darkness and despair because of a lost love.

This woman that he desired and wanted more than anything in the world. Lenore. And this raven flies into his room. And it starts acting as... It says only a single word throughout the entirety of the poem.

Nevermore. And the author goes mad with rage as he's having this conversation with this raven. And he asks them, is there going to be any hope?

Is there any hope in this world? And the raven simply says, nevermore. Is there any hope in the world to come, in the afterlife? And the raven says, nevermore.

[11:28] He says, will I ever see the love that I've lost again, this Lenore? And the raven says, nevermore. See, when we pursue and pursue and pursue the thing that we think will fulfill us the most, we're left broken and we're left in sorrow.

And that's exactly where Israel is left. If you go through this passage, and we don't have time to go through point by point, line by line, but what you see is the laundry list of things that they trusted in. Can our wealth save us? Nevermore. Can an abundant harvest save us? Nevermore. Can our future generations save us?

Nevermore. Can our kings and politicians save us? Nevermore. Can our religious feasts and festivals save us? Nevermore. And I think if we were to put our own list next to Israel's, we'd see something very similar, wouldn't we?

We live in an incredibly wealthy place. An incredibly wealthy, well, really, group of nations. With Europe, me from America. Amazing wealth.

[12:41] Amazing wealth. Can that save us? The Bible says, nevermore. Can our Western values, our liberal Western values save us?

Nevermore. What about our children? We educate our children so well. We pour so much of ourselves into loving and nurturing and raising up the next generation to not repeat the same mistakes that we've made.

Can't that save us? Nevermore. What if we change political parties? What if we vote for the right candidates?

Can that possibly bring about change? Nevermore. What if we're spiritual enough? What if we pursue the right spiritual values and we really either start going to church or temple or mosque or maybe we do yoga on Saturday mornings?

Could that make a difference? Nevermore. And all of the things that we pursue, all of the things that we place our hope in, all of the things that we think can fulfill us and save us and fill the deepest longings of our hearts.

[14:07] Leave us broken and in despair. And for Israel, it left them completely and utterly devastated. Going off into captivity.

A broken nation. Why would God allow such despair? Why would God allow suffering? That's the big question that our society asks of the God of the Bible, isn't it?

They look at a passage like this and they say, well, why would a good God do that? And the answer in the case of Israel is fairly simple. It's to save them from themselves.

It's because the God of Israel is a God who had provided them with everything.

It was a blessing of his grace. Good harvest. The land. Children. Wealth. You name it. Whatever they had that was good was provided by God out of the abundance of his grace.

[15:10] It was a blessing from him. And yet they turned their back on him. See, Israel wanted the blessing, but they didn't want the God. And so God simply said, then I'm going to take away the blessing.

I'm going to remove myself from this relationship. And the results are devastating. See, the underlying message here is not that God allows suffering.

It's that we actually pursue suffering by pursuing our idols. Now, we can probably all agree that up to this point, this passage has been a real downer, hasn't it?

But there is actually a sliver of hope. And we see it in verse 12 of chapter 10. And God calls his people back to himself. Verse 12, he says this, Sow for yourselves righteousness.

Weep steadfast love. Break up your fallow ground. For it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.

[16:21] And he lays out three images there. Sow righteousness. Break up fallow ground. Seek the Lord. And what all three of these pictures really calls to, it's agrarian pictures, isn't it?

Of the need for replanting. For churning up fields that haven't been planted in some time. That are in need of nourishment.

That are in need of effort and work. All three are really calling to faith and repentance. To seek the God who had given them everything.

Now some of us might go, this sounds just like another form of idolatry. Is God really saying to his people that if they do the right things, then he's going to bless them again?

Isn't that the same expectation that they had of the idols that they had made? That if we could just do certain things right, then we'll be blessed. Well, the term righteousness here actually has a much deeper meaning.

[17:27] To sow righteousness was not simply a calling for them to do the right things. To feed the poor, to be nice, to do works of social justice.

It wasn't that. It was a calling for God's people to return to covenant faithfulness. What that means is a calling for them to return to and believe the promises that God had made to their forefathers. Promises that God was still willing to stand by. And he's calling them first to believe. To believe those promises.

And second, to turn from unrighteousness. And third, to let him heal them. See, while there are some things that they could do, they were ultimately dependent on God to rain righteousness down upon them.

And that's how it is in our lives, isn't it? That there are certain things that when you look at the Bible, you know, this is what God is clearly calling us to do. But we can't do those things.

[18:44] Unless he is willing to rain his righteousness and his grace. Down upon us. It's not by our works. But by the great work of God.

See, the salvation that Israel was called to in this rudimentary form. We have seen and received fully in the personal work of Jesus Christ.

Just as we pursue idolatry and the fullness of idolatry. We have received grace in its complete fullness in Jesus Christ.

Because it is in Christ that God has rained down his righteousness upon us. It's in Christ that the fulfillment of God's promise of salvation for his people is received.

It is in Christ that we see the exodus renewed. That he's taking his people from slavery to sin. And delivering them to righteousness in his kingdom.

[19:48] And it's Christ who today calls us to sow righteousness. To pursue righteousness through faith in him.

That's the calling of this passage. That's the calling on our lives. It's the calling of Christ Jesus. It was the calling for Israel so long ago. It's the calling for us in the 21st century western world today. Please pray with me. Thank you.