

# Hosea 6:4 - 7:16

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Preacher: Stuart Cashman

[ 0 : 00 ] A while ago I took a friend of mine out for dinner. I knew things were hard for him, which is why I wanted to take him out for a meal. And as we started chatting, I wanted to chat about his children really, but he suddenly opened up. He said, my wife's told me she doesn't love me anymore.

In fact, she says she probably never did. She's going to leave in five years when the kids are a bit older. She's going to live with me until then and we'll keep going through the motions. Now as I listened to that story, it's such a contrast to the wedding day a few years earlier where I stood next to him at the front and the bride had been big smiles, beautifully dressed.

And yet the promises she made then, she apparently had no intention of keeping. The love she professed then was like a cloud, like the morning dew. It had vanished. It had vanished. And we could see no hope for that marriage without a rustic change of heart on the part of the bride. Now that's tragic, isn't it? And maybe for some of you, you've experienced that tragedy in your own lives and I'm sorry if you have. The situation here in Hosea 6 and 7 is in a sense even more tragic. Because something even bigger is at stake than the happiness of a marriage and the well-being of the children. For eternity is at stake here. And the problem is exactly the same. You see, the problem is stated clearly by the Lord in verse 4, isn't it?

[ 1 : 26 ] What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? A name for Israel. What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. You can remember, I'm sure, those kind of spring mornings, beautiful blue skies, dew on the ground, and the day warms up and by lunchtime it's all gone.

Imagine what it's like in the desert. It goes even more quickly than that. Yet the Lord says, that's what your love is like. That's what the love of my friend's wife was like. And if we're honest, isn't it actually what our love for the Lord is like sometimes?

Those who are Christians, we go to church on a Sunday, we sing God's praises, we delight to be with his people, yet Monday morning hits, and we're back in the office, or we're back getting frustrated with our kids, or having problems with our families, and we just forget about the Lord. We're just too busy, too absorbed in our own work, or advancing our own career, or paying our own bills. We forget him. And as we look through these verses, we're going to see the signs of our love being like a morning cloud, the signs of our love just vaporizing.

Also, the consequences of them, and the only hope for restoration in the midst of that. So first of all, the signs of love being fleeting and fickle.

[ 2 : 41 ] The first sign really is in verse 6. What does God want? I desire steadfast love, and not sacrifice. The knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.

Think about my friend with his wife. She said she'd stay with him for another few years, and kind of look after the kids, and go through the motions. To the outside world looking on, she'd still look like a good wife. But do you think that's what he wanted?

He wants love, doesn't he? And so it is for the Lord. He doesn't want people going through religious motions. He wants our love, our devotion. And yet we can fall into the same pattern as Israel, can't we?

We turn up to church on Sunday morning, get home in the afternoon, think, oh, good, the rest of the day is my own now. I've done my religious bit. Or we give money to the church. Perhaps we haven't adjusted that standing order for a long time.

Or maybe we just give them cash in our pocket when we get in. Think when we've done our bit, the rest of the money is mine. Or perhaps we serve in our church. We work hard in the church, teaching children, looking after the building, whatever it is.

[ 3 : 47 ] And we think, well, we've done our bit now. And we get resentful of other people who we don't see doing their bit. See, as soon as we start thinking of following God as ticking off things to do, keeping rules, being religious, then there's no real love for him in our hearts.

And also, it turns out, then, into pride, doesn't it? It's a problem that Jesus encountered in his own day. The Pharisees, the strict religious leaders of the day, looked at Jesus hanging out with tax collectors and sinners.

And they said to him, Matthew 9, verse 11, or said to his disciples, Why did your teachers eat with tax collectors and sinners? Why is he with those people down there who are inferior, who aren't as religious and good as we are?

See, it was pride. And what does Jesus say to them? Jesus said, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means.

And here he quotes Hosea, chapter 6, verse 6. I desire mercy, or steadfast love, and not sacrifice. I came to call the righteous, not to call the righteous, but sinners.

[ 4 : 55 ] Jesus is saying, what God wants is for his people to show mercy the way God has shown mercy to them. So people to show steadfast love the way God has shown steadfast love to them.

He doesn't want merely religious rules. That only makes us proud. He doesn't want empty devotion. Now maybe some of us in this room have been hurt by Christians looking down on us.

They think they're morally superior or nicer people. Or maybe some people here have been put off Christianity by seeing the child abuse scandals in the church.

Or what they see as a hypocrisy in the church. Well, if that's you, then I am sorry. I really am. And can I encourage you to instead look at what God wants.

Because he doesn't want religious duty. He doesn't want proud religious people looking down at you. He wants steadfast love and mercy. He wants people to know him.

[ 5 : 54 ] He wants real love. So that's the first sign. Kind of empty religious devotion. The second sign is, let's call it autonomy and self-determination.

Look at verse 7. Look at verse 7. Like Adam, they transgressed the covenant. They dealt faithlessly with me. Here the Lord is pointing them back to the garden of Eden. To Adam, the first man he made.

And God had made an amazing place in Eden. He'd planted a beautiful garden. He'd put Adam and Eve there to look after it and take care of it. And he said, go have a great time.

Cultivate the garden. Go investigate. Go develop science and art and culture. Enjoy all the beauty I've made for you. But there's one rule. As you do this.

Just don't eat the fruit from that tree. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Don't eat the fruit from that tree. Because you cannot determine what is good and evil for yourself.

[ 6 : 49 ] That's my job because I'm God. If you keep living in dependency on me, everything will be good. But don't eat from that or you will die. But Adam ate the fruit.

He decided he wanted to choose right and wrong for himself. He decided he didn't want God interfering. He wanted to do things his own way. And that is the pattern that every human being has lived ever since. We all go the same way as Adam.

We turn away from this loving, beautiful creator God. And see, we want autonomy. We want to do it my way. As Frank Sinatra sang.

We want to do what suits us. And when that happens, society unravels, doesn't it? And that's where we get a picture of that here in verses 8 to 10. So verse 8.

Gilead is the city of evildoers, trapped with blood. Now that doesn't mean anything to us. But in 2 Kings chapter 15 verse 25, we discover that in Hosea's day, 50 men from Gilead had conspired to assassinate King Manahem.

[ 7 : 49 ] Now even the priests, who should have known better, were involved in all this stuff.

Involved in the corruption. They were seeking their own good rather than doing what God had instructed. There's autonomy.

Another sign of love that is like a vapor. We also get this third sign, verse 7. Verse 7, verse 2. They do not consider that I remember all their evil.

Now their deeds surround them. They're before my face. So they were living as if God didn't see and didn't know what they were up to. There's a story a little while back about a woman who was known as Lindsay.

Who on her Facebook account posted on her wall, I hate my job. My boss is always making me do bleep stuff. Just bleep. She also accused her boss, Brian, of being lecherous towards her. What she'd forgotten is that she'd already made Brian one of her friends on Facebook. Her deeds were right before his face. So she got into a shock when he posted back, Hi Lindsay, I guess you forgot about adding me on here.

[ 8 : 54 ] And he went on telling her how she can get her stuff, whatever she wanted to, but she needn't turn up for work the next day. Job over. Well Israel were living like that. They were living like God was far off, didn't see, didn't know, didn't care.

And yet he knew everything. Their deeds were right before them. Right before him. Well as well as that you get corruption that comes as well. Verse 3. They are evil, they make the king glad, and the princes by their treachery.

The king should have upheld justice. But the land is so corrupt as everyone is turning away, doing their own thing. Not loving the Lord. In the following verses, Hosea describes a party for the king. It's a feast where they're all getting drunk. Heated like ovens, Hosea puts it. Like an oven the baker doesn't even need to stir, it's so hot. While the dough is leavening, he doesn't need to do anything about it.

They're hot with their passion, hot with their desires. And he says, verse 7, they devour their rulers. In Hosea's time, within about 12 years, four kings were assassinated.

[ 10 : 00 ] Four kings were assassinated. A ton of incredible insecurity and instability in Israel. Now why did that happen? Because all the nobles, all the people who had some power, wanted more power.

Or wanted to find a way of securing their influence. Securing their wealth and everything else. And so they take out the king who they didn't think was doing a good job.

A bit like premiership football clubs or indeed the England rugby team. They don't get the results they want, so they'll go anywhere else to get someone else they hope will deliver. How often do we do the same as well?

We long for security. We long for peace. We long to be able to flourish. We long for something to give meaning to life.

And we go this way and that, going on to the next thing, which we hope will give it to us. But nothing will. See the tragedy at the end of verse 7? All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me.

[ 11 : 01 ] God had promised that if they were faithful, if they lived his way, if they loved him, he would provide stability, he would provide leadership, he would provide security. Yet they're looking everywhere else.

And then we go on to pride and other symptoms of their love for themselves rather than for God. Look at verse 8. They're no longer fit for purpose.

Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples. Ephraim is a cake not turned. I was cooking some pancakes on Saturday morning, as I do, and because I was doing something for one of my children at the time, I came back and realised, sorry Joel, your pancake is now burnt on one side.

Completely useless, isn't it? If you don't turn it over, it's useless. And that's what God is saying here about Israel. They are useless. Like a pancake that has not been turned over. Why? Because they're mixing with the peoples.

See the Lord had chosen Israel in the first place to bring his blessing to all the nations of the earth. That was their purpose. And the way they were to do that was to be separate and distinct from the nations around them.

[ 12 : 05 ] You think about Médecins Sans Frontières doctors in West Africa going to help people with the Ebola virus. How can they do good in that situation? Well, they do good by making sure they don't get infected themselves, don't they?

They have to keep themselves safe so they can do the good they've been called to do. It's kind of like that with Israel. They weren't to be contaminated, they weren't to be mixed in with the practices of the nations around them.

They were to be separate, distinct, so that God's good news, God's blessing and God's salvation could come through them to the rest of the world. But they're no longer fit for purpose. They're like a cake burnt on one side because they've mixed in with the peoples.

And in their pride, they don't even realise it. Look at verse 9. Strangers devour his strength, he knows it not. Grey hairs are strinkled upon him, and he knows it not. Israel's like the pensioner who turns up at the One Direction concert.

And everyone else looks at him and goes, what is he doing here? And yet he thinks he's really cool. So the problem is pride. And pride stops them coming to one person who can change them and rescue them and restore them.

[13:12] Look at verse 10. The pride of Israel testifies to his face. They do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek him for all this. See, if only they sought the Lord, they'd have what they really needed.

But they don't love him, and they're moving away. Well, there's foolishness and pride. There's also fickleness. Look at that answer, verse 11. Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense.

Going to Egypt, going to Assyria. You picture the bird flitting out, flitting there, flitting everywhere, trying to find a safe place. Israel was trapped, if you like, between Assyria, the great army in the north, and Egypt in the south.

And during this time, they're always trying to make political alliances, one or the other, trading these two off. The Lord says that makes no sense. You're like a silly bird, trapped. You don't know what you're doing.

And you're forgetful as well. Verse 15. Although I trained and strengthened their arms, yet they devised evil against me. They returned, but not upward. They're like a treacherous boat.

[14:14] They've forgotten all that God has done for them. So they look everywhere else. And aren't we also so forgetful? I know when friends and family are ill, I will pray.

And then I can so easily forget when the prayer is answered. We're like that, aren't we? When a crisis comes, we can pray and pray and pray. And we forget that all we actually have comes from God.

When life is calm, we forget. Well, that's the signs of this love like a morning cloud. This love that just evaporates. Religious motions without devotion.

Autonomy. Pride. Fickleness. Folly. You see the consequences very briefly and very clearly in verse 13. woe to them for they have strayed from me destruction to them for they have rebelled against me that's it the Lord says this marriage is over you have walked away destruction is coming Israel in 722 BC it did come when the king of Assyria came and destroyed the land and took people off into captivity and destruction and judgment are the consequence for every human being who turns his or her back on our maker we were made to know him made to love him made to find our security and our purpose and our love and our joy in him and if we turn away from the one true God there is only disaster and judgment to come now maybe you're thinking at this point this is typical religious stuff this is God being mean and scary to scare people into doing what he wants and that just doesn't sound good maybe you think I'm trying to scare you into doing something well I've given you that impression that I have not been true to the message of Hosea did you notice that several times look at verse 7 of chapter 7 the Lord wants to do something for these people who are running away all their kings have fallen 7 verse 7 and none calls on me we hear the Lord's true desire for his people indeed back in the end of chapter 6 verse 11 for you also are Judah a harvest there is a harvest of judgment is appointed when I restore the fortunes of my people see God is saying I'm going to restore the fortunes of my people you have walked away but I'm going to do something I will act in judgment but I will act to restore do you catch that? the Lord longs to restore his people he longs to restore them to a society where there is fruitfulness rather than deception and violence he wants them to be politically stable rather than chasing every next king he wants them economically to restore their fortunes he wants his people to enjoy the freedom which he had brought them for he wants them to fulfil the purpose which he had called them for here in verse 11 of chapter 6 he says that he will restore the fortunes when the harvest of judgment is appointed well how does that happen?

[17:28] how can God could God just begin the rebellion of his people? no of course not he is a holy God he loves his people he cannot ignore things but he has to make sure that sin and rebellion and faithlessness is paid for and he did that through his own son through the Lord Jesus Christ the Lord Jesus Christ was always faithful to his father he always loved God he didn't just ever go through the motions he loved his father wholeheartedly and consistently he did what his father wanted many times in John's Gospel particularly he says I come to do the will of him who sent me he came to do that he came to be what we could never be he came to fulfil God's purpose of

bringing his blessing to all the peoples of the earth as Jesus himself put it in John chapter 6 verse 38 I have come down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me and this is the will of him who sent me that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me but raise it up on the last day for this is the will of my father that everyone who looks on the son and believes in him should have eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day see this is the way we can enjoy restoration not through our own effort but through trusting in the son of God who came for us came to rescue us came to fulfil God's purposes came to be the people

Israel was supposed to be and as we trust in him he raises us up he raises us up on the last day to eternal life with him but he raises us up now in terms of giving us new life changing our hearts was there any hope for my friend's marriage I described at the start none unless his wife has a complete change of heart was there any hope for us none unless we're given a complete change of heart now for the nation in Hosea's day it proved too late yet there were some in Hosea's audience who could repent and believe and trust in the goodness of God and love him still and for all of us now that is an option that is open to come back to this Lord through Jesus Christ to accept the forgiveness he offers to ask for our hearts to be made new so that our love will not be like the morning dew like the cloud that disappears so quickly

God doesn't need us God doesn't need you to fulfill his purposes but you and I do need God the question is do we want him or we go to Jesus to ask let's pray God desde desde desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde!