

Hosea 5:1 - 6:13

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[0 : 00] I'll confess to you that I find this a difficult passage, as you probably do as well, reading it. It's some difficult things in it, but I hope we can look at this and unpack a bit what's going on here. Richard Dawkins, the atheist, we mentioned him, it seems, from time to time here, and it's, to be honest, because he's said such provocative things about the God of the Bible. He's an easy target for ridicule. But Richard Dawkins said in his book, *The God Delusion*, the God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction. He's jealous and proud of it. And then he goes on to say more, but I'll stop there, because I think there's two things that I want to point out about it. One, Richard Dawkins' reading comprehension is somewhat selective. But secondly, he actually gets a little bit right, despite his selective reading. God is jealous, isn't he? And that's what we see here. And what I want to suggest to you this afternoon is that a jealous God is the best God to have.

[1 : 14] A jealous God is actually exactly the God that you need. It might not be the God you think you want, but he's the God that you absolutely need. God is indeed a jealous God, and that's why he's actually so good.

Would you really want a God who isn't jealous? Would you really want a God who isn't jealous? A God who isn't jealous is sort of like the wife who doesn't care if her husband is sleeping around. There's no true loving relationship there. It's a marriage of perhaps convenience at best. My wife and I have been watching the show *Mr. Selfridge* about the turn of the century, early 1900s turn of the century.

A mogul who came over from America and decided he was going to conquer the London store scene.

And he builds this huge store down on Oxford Street, what they called the dead end of Oxford Street. And he said it's going to be the live end of Oxford Street soon. And they present him as this very well put together man who has wealthy backers and he has a loving wife.

[2 : 35] And they look at this relationship with his wife. And at first it looks like he's a happily married man, a man who has a special relationship with his wife.

But very quickly we learn that Mr. Selfridge is in fact a playboy. That he jumps from one lover to the next. That he occasionally shows some interest in his wife.

And he'll shower her with special gifts that no other man could possibly provide for her. He's around for the holidays. But it isn't really a marriage. There's not really true love there.

And it's at best convenience and perhaps even a security blanket. And that's exactly where we find Israel in this passage. In their relationship to God, isn't it?

Their relationship to God has become at best a convenience. At most a security blanket. They go through the motions of being God's people.

[3 : 38] They still follow the ceremony. But they've taken on many lovers. They're pursuing many other gods. And what we see in our passage this afternoon. Is actually the true character of God being revealed.

He is a jealous God. Yes. Absolutely. And that is a good thing. In fact, God is so good. That he will not allow his people to pursue evil unhindered.

That's our first point. God is so good. That he does not allow his people to freely pursue evil. Last week, Stuart laid out God's accusations of what his people were doing.

And today we really get to see God's judgment on all of those accusations. The results of those accusations. How bad had things gotten? I think it's safe to say, reading what we have before us, that Israel had become a people who we could say were spiritual but not religious.

Have you heard that phrase before in our modern times? When I was on the university campus doing ministry in the States, I heard that a lot from students.

[4 : 55] Well, I'm a spiritual person, but I'm not really religious. And what they meant by that was, I like to think about God. I like to sort of reflect on spiritual things.

I like to maybe go to a yoga class where we talk about meditation and then go to a Passover feast with a group of Jewish people.

And then maybe on occasion even visit the church. But I'm not actually really committed to anything. I'm not actually pursuing a faithful relationship with God.

And what we see here is Israel pursued openly other gods. Look in verses 3 and 4 here. I know Ephraim and Israel is not hidden from me.

For now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore. Israel is defiled. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. That's an important phrase. We'll come back to that.

[5 : 57] For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the Lord. See, the picture God paints of his people here is a people who would, in their words and their deeds, perhaps say, We are God's people.

But they're wandering. As Hosea uses the term, they're pouring themselves out to other gods. Israel goes through the motions of worship. In verse 6 we see they continue to bring their sacrifices, their flocks and their herds.

They're going through the motions of worship. But there's no heart that's pursuing God. And probably the most damning thing here is verse 7.

They have dealt faithlessly with the Lord, for they have born alien children. Now what does that phrase mean?

There's a lot of controversy and discussion over what this verse actually points to. But if you understand the covenant relationship that God had with his people Israel, then this verse makes a lot of sense.

[7 : 06] Because what the promise of the covenant was, was that God would love his people for generation after generation after generation. If they pursued him and were faithful to his commands and to his loving help.

And what God means when he says, you have born alien children. He says, you are raising children to not know me and to not love me.

To forsake your God, the true God. It's an awful thing, isn't it? To say that your children are alien to me.

I don't know them. They are not my children. So what does this mean for us? Well, let me ask this question.

Why do so many people go to church at Christmas, but we never see them any other time of the year? I was talking to a friend of mine.

[8 : 03] Her children go to my son's school. She was asking me about church. And we were having a discussion. I said, do you attend somewhere? Do you have a church? And she said, well, my husband and I never really grew up in that.

It's not something that we really pursue. But at Christmas, we like to make sure our son knows the Christmas message and the Christmas story. See, it's spirituality without any real religion.

Without any real calling and commitment to the God of the universe. And how does God respond to his people? Well, the response is punishment, isn't it?

But not just punishment. It's a withdrawal of his presence. Look at verse 6. He says, the second half of verse 6. He says, they will not find him.

That's God. He has withdrawn from them. That's an awful thing to hear, isn't it? But God has withdrawn himself from his people.

[9 : 05] And the result of that withdrawal is that now Israel is susceptible to invaders. There's no longer the protection of God over his people.

And we see in verses 8 and 9 that this call of warning. Blow the horn and the trumpet.

Sound the alarm. Why? Because the Assyrians are going to come. And they're going to invade Israel. And they're going to crush God's people.

And even more than that, in verse 10, we see that Israel's leaders are powerless to help them. Why?

Because they're completely corrupt. We tend to end up with the leaders we deserve, don't we? That's really what God's saying there, isn't it?

[9 : 59] We tend to end up with the leaders we deserve. It's always dangerous to tread on politics. So I'll just tread on American politics, if you don't mind. In the States, we've had for many, many years now this promise of hope and change, if you've followed politics at all.

And what happens after eight years of hope and change? Well, now you've got one party saying, we're going to be the real party of hope and change. Then you have another party that says, well, no, no, no.

Things are going really well. You want to stick with us. And that's been going on. That's not a new thing. That's been going on for 2030. Well, probably really as long as the U.S. has been going on. Why? Well, because people think that their leaders can save them.

And what God says here is that there is no political solution to the problem. Even in verse 13, we see when God's people recognize their sickness, it says, and their wounds.

What do they do? Well, they look for a political solution, don't they? They go to the great king of Assyria. And they ask him to save them.

[11 : 13] And what's the result? He's not able to cure you or heal your wounds. There's no political solution to the problem that Israel has.

Because it's a spiritual problem. See, God is clearly in control. And his wrath cannot be stopped by man. Because it's all-consuming.

And Hosea drives home the terror of this point by showing a series of images of what God's punishment will be like. He says in verse 10, it will be like a flood of water.

A flood of water, of course, is an unstoppable thing, right? When it happens, it takes over. It consumes. It can't be stopped. It's going to be like a devouring moth in verse 12.

That's an interesting image for us, isn't it? But moths could destroy and can still even destroy so much. When I read that, though, I always think of the Japanese films with Mothra in them.

[12 : 15] You know, the monster film. But that's not what's meant here. As a just an aside, if you want to know my taste in film. It's going to be like corrosive rot.

This is one that I can relate to. Do you know why I love renting a house? Because when I owned a house, every time I turned around, something was broken.

Because I owned an old house in the States. Old by United States standards. It was built in 1930. So a new development for the UK. But every time I turned around, a water pipe was rusted through. Or the roof was leaking. Or there was dry rot on some board somewhere that needed to be released. Or the electrical system was going bad. And every time I turned around, something was not right with my house.

And God says, that's exactly what my punishment is going to be like for you. It's going to eat away. It's slowly and surely, it's going to eat away at you. And it's going to drive you mad.

[13 : 17] And it's going to leave you destitute. Verse 13, I think it uses the imagery of a festering wind. Something that can only be fixed through the cutting it off.

And then finally, verse 14, a vicious lion who tears and devours and drags off and no one can rescue.

So what do we do with this? What do we do with this? It sounds so terrible, doesn't it? Maybe Richard Dawkins is right. Maybe God is a monster.

But to understand this, we really have to first examine our own cultural assumptions about God. We have to reflect on those for a moment. We tend to assume that God is far off.

That He's sitting up in the clouds and He's watching us. And we assume that we need to get His attention and that He's there to every now and then give us a little push along, right?

[14 : 20] Just to help us along our way. Maybe to inspire us to be better people or to help us get what we want in our lives. Or we assume that God should be primarily concerned with our happiness.

Or we assume we can get God to do what we want if we keep a few rules like going to church at Christmas or praying every now and then when things get difficult. But that's not the picture of God that this passage presents, is it?

It's a picture of a God who is active and present in our world. It's a picture of a God who is intimate with His people.

And that's the key for us to understand. that this is a God who wants a true relationship with His people. He wants to know them deeply.

And their unfaithfulness causes real hurt to God. He is a God who is passionate for the good of His people.

[15 : 23] And He knows that they will not find what they desire most in the arms of one of their lovers. See, it's with this understanding that we can say God is good even in His wrath.

Because His wrath is calling His people back to Him. How good is God? He is so good that He withholds the fullness of His wrath.

That's what we see in verse 15. He doesn't completely destroy His people the nation Israel. But He shows there is purpose to His discipline. Verse 15 He says I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face and in their distress earnestly seek Me.

He doesn't completely destroy His people. It isn't petty vengefulness but purposeful discipline. His full wrath could have completely annihilated His people couldn't it?

That's the kind of God we're talking about. He's a big God. But His wrath His punishment has clear purpose. And that purpose is to restore His people to a right relationship with Him.

[16 : 37] See, God knows that when Israel realizes their misery at His absence they will return to Him because they are first and foremost His people. And this was a time for Israel of first reflection.

And the calling of this verse is relevant to us today, isn't it? It's a calling to consider our own disease and our own sin that separates us from God.

And it's healthy and necessary for us to do that. It's healthy and necessary for us to reflect on the ways that we have sinned and the ways that we have damaged our relationship to God and separated ourselves from Him.

It's healthy for us to be convicted of that and to seek out God for forgiveness. Does God seem distant to you? Does God ever seem distant to you?

Or perhaps in that He's actually speaking to you and calling you to repentance. See, God is so good that He pauses the fullness of His wrath and withholds its fullness in order to bring us to Himself.

[17 : 44] God is a good God. How good is He? Well, God is so good that He heals the brokenness of His people.

Look at chapter 6 verses 1-3. And just to warn you, what we have here are the words of true repentance. We have a picture of true repentance.

The words of true repentance are written here. Unfortunately, we're going to see next week that Israel lacked truly repentant hearts. But that's going to be next week. Stuart just told me I should give you that spoiler alert.

But for now, let's look at what's said here. Why return to the Lord? Why do they return to the Lord? Because they see that in Him alone they can find healing.

It's out of a recognition that only the one the only one that could heal them was the one who tore them. How can God be both the punisher of His people and the healer of His people?

[18 : 50] Well, we have the full answer to that, don't we? In the personal work of Jesus Christ. When we look at the cross, we see how God can be both the punisher and the healer.

See, it's at the cross where we see the fullness of God's wrath poured out on His Son for us. where Jesus Christ is torn for your sins and my sins.

It's there that we see the fullness of restoration, the fullness of healing as Christ is raised on the third day. And it's there that we find our own restoration in a Savior who has purchased us by His blood.

So what Israel only saw in shadow, we get to see in fullness. in the calling on our lives from this chapter is really a simple one. And it's stated very simply in the final verse.

Let us press on to know the Lord. The calling on our lives is to press on to know the Lord. The calling of this verse for you today is to leave behind your sin and your guilt, to flee the people and the things that you've been seeking fulfillment in and to find your healing by seeking to know God through Jesus Christ.

[20 : 17] And we know Him because we have seen Him fully in the work of Christ Jesus. Press on to know the Lord. Please pray with me.