

(Hosea) Come, Let Us Return to the Lord

by David Guzik

The sermon emphasizes the critical importance of knowing God to uphold truth and mercy in society and the dire consequences of neglecting this knowledge.

Duration: 56:06

Scripture: Hosea 4:6, Hosea 6:1-2, Hosea 6:4-6

Topics: "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the consequences of abandoning the knowledge of God. He emphasizes that when people abandon truth, mercy, and restraint, they create a society filled with violence and bloodshed. The speaker cites Hosea chapter 4, where God brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land for their lack of truth, mercy, and knowledge of God. The sermon also highlights the corrupt and ineffective leadership of the priests, who were contended with by the people instead of being listened to.

Transcript

Hosea chapter 4, let's just begin here, verse 1. Hear the word of the Lord, you children of Israel, for the Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land. There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint with bloodshed after bloodshed.

Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells there will waste away with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Even the fish of the sea will be taken away." Transport yourself, if you will, to a courtroom scene. Here it is, Israel's on trial.

The judge opens up the proceedings and he says, Hear ye, hear ye, the charge is against Israel. The Lord brings a charge against the inhabitants of the land. And what's the charge? Look at it here in verse 1, the end part.

There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. I want you to see, first of all, that each one of these three points is connected. Truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God.

You see, when people forsake the knowledge of God, soon truth and mercy are both gone. Truth is gone because truth must be rooted in something more than just personal opinion. And mercy means going

beyond self-interest.

If you don't know God and recognize Him for who He is, then you may as well measure everything by yourself. And there is no truth. There's just your truth, and your truth, and your truth, and your truth, but there is no truth that everybody has to answer to.

Leave the knowledge of God, you leave the truth. But it's the same way with mercy. If there is no God that I must answer to, if there is no God in heaven who has shown me His mercy, then why should I show mercy to you? I should only show you mercy when it's in my self-interest to do so, and mercy is rarely in my self-interest.

So friends, true wisdom and understanding, they always begin with the knowledge of God. Proverbs 9, verse 10 says, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding. It all begins with knowing the Lord, knowing Him.

Some people think that knowing God is something that's too far beyond human understanding, that we just shouldn't even concern ourselves with it. I mean, here we are, we live on this earth, let's just try to understand the earth, let's just try to understand ourselves, and leave God to be Himself, we should just be concerned about ourselves. This was expressed in the words of a famous writer many years ago, in something that's sort of become a saying, or a proverb.

In his poetry, Alexander Pope, he wrote, know then thyself, presume not God to scan the proper study of mankind is man. Well, an even more famous writer named Charles Spurgeon responded to that statement. He said, it's been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man.

I will not oppose the idea, but I believe that it's equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God, that the proper study of the Christian is the Godhead, the highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy which can ever engage the attention of a child of God is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. It all comes back to knowing God. We mean this in two senses.

We mean this, first of all, in the sense of knowing who God is in the sense of the facts and the attributes of his character. Knowing that God is holy. Knowing that God is omniscient.

Knowing that God is loving. Knowing that God is righteous. Knowing him in all of his personality.

But it also means knowing him in the sense of a deep, close, personal relationship with him. It combines both things. Knowing about God and knowing him in a deeply personal way.

You leave those two things behind, and then soon you'll leave truth behind and mercy behind. And this is God's charge against Israel. Look at it here in verse one.

There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. And then look at how it plays out beginning at verse two. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint.

It all connects back to leaving the knowledge of God. When you leave truth and when mercy is a thing of the past, then people no longer practice restraint. And then look what happens when man will not or cannot restrain himself.

It follows at the end of verse two. They break all restraint with bloodshed after bloodshed. In the original Hebrew, this is literally bloody deed touches bloody deed.

The idea is of a continual string of violence and blood that defiles the whole land. See, friends, that's the result. Abandon the knowledge of God, then you'll abandon truth, you'll abandon mercy, you'll cast off all restraint, and then you'll have a violent, bloody society.

Is it even necessary for me to cite crime statistics? To talk about the numbers of murders and the terrible state of our culture and our society? The way violence is widespread and literally after bloody deed touches bloody deed? It all comes back to the idea that our modern age is completely set against the idea of restraint. You could apply what they say in verse two to our culture right now. They break all restraint.

Now, you see it very vividly in the life and in the actions of a violent criminal. He says, nobody can restrain me. I can kill whoever I want, whenever I want, or take whatever I want, anytime I want.

But you see it even more vividly in the mindset of the entire culture. Breaking all restraint. How about in the modern advertising slogans? Think about them, listen to them with some discernment on the radio or the television.

To know no boundaries. Know rules just right. Just do it.

Break all the rules. Peel off inhibitions. Find your own road.

Living without boundaries. Each one of these slogans in national advertising campaigns, and you might say, what possibly does that have to do with buying an automobile or an investment service? Well, it's simply this. They know that that kind of idea appeals to human nature.

Sinful human nature, but it appeals to it. And all they want you to do is identify a positive association, positive according to your fallen nature, a positive association with their name or their product or whatever. But if you open your eyes and look for it, you're going to be astounded.

That's the whole theme in our culture today. The only rules in your life are the ones you want to have. You don't know any boundaries beyond that.

So the message is the same. You make your own rules. You answer to no one.

You're the only one that matters. Your universe revolves around you. You should only restrain yourself if you want to.

See where it all begins? Back with departing from the knowledge of God. Friends, if you know God, you can't think that way. If you know God, then you know that you have to answer to somebody.

You know that there's a loving, just, righteous God who's enthroned in the heavens and will hold you accountable. And you can't say to no, no boundaries because there's your boundary right up there. He sets them.

You can't say no rules just right because you know he sets the rules. So you see, it all comes back to the knowledge of God. But I'll tell you where it all ends up.

You see it there in verse three. And everyone who dwells there will waste away. Friends, this is the tragic fruit of forsaking the knowledge of God, of departing from truth and mercy and restraint.

Oh, Satan knows how to sing sweetly to us and make us think or make us hope that casting away these things is a doorway to freedom. Well, you want to be free, cast off all restraint. Well, you want to be free, then no, no boundaries.

But friends, it's not a doorway to freedom. It's a doorway to destruction. The only way you're going to know life is to live under God's boundaries.

Now, if it's bad enough, then in his opening statement, God applies this over the whole nation of Israel. Now, beginning in verse four, he's going to lay his finger at the leadership of the nation. Most notably, the spiritual leadership.

He's going to condemn the corrupt and ineffective leadership of the priests. Look at it here in verse four. Now, let no man contend or reprove another, for your people are like those who contend with the priest.

Therefore, you shall stumble in the day. The prophet also shall stumble with you in the night, and I will destroy your mother. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge.

I also will reject you from being priest for me, because you have forgotten the law of your God. I also will forget your children. The more they increased, the more they sinned against me.

I will change their glory into shame. They will eat up the sin of their people. Excuse me, they eat up the sin of my people.

They set their heart on their iniquity. You see, first God speaks to the people, and he says, your people are like those who contend with the priest. You know, in passages like Deuteronomy chapter 17, verses 9 through 12, God clearly commanded the people to listen to, and to submit to the priest, because what the priest were there to do were to help the people with the word of God.

You make a big mistake if you think that the priests of Israel were all supposed to just sort of camp out at the temple and wait until somebody brought along a sacrifice. God distributed the priests of Israel all over the land, commanded them to be in different cities scattered all over the land. And what they were charged with doing was teaching the people, guiding them, instructing them in the ways of the Lord, and helping them in their daily walk before God.

They were, if you will, pastors spread across the whole land. You see, because the people cast off the knowledge of God, because they let go of truth and mercy and restraint, they wouldn't listen to the priests, and they contended with them instead. You see here, God says the result of it, look at it there in verse 4, or excuse me, verse 5, therefore you shall stumble in the day.

You get the idea there? Look, it's bad enough to stumble in the night, but at least you can understand it, right? I tripped over that log, I couldn't see it, it was night outside, well, who can blame me? But no, you're going to stumble during the day. That's how messed up you're going to be. That's how many obstacles are going to be in your path.

You see, when God's people cast off the knowledge of God, when they cast off restraint and guidance from leaders, then they'll stumble even in the day. Oh, but it gets worse. Did you see the rest of verse 5? The prophet also shall stumble with you in the night.

God paints the picture so bleak here that even the prophet is dragged down to the level of the people and he stumbles. Perhaps the prophet thought that he was safe or immune because of his spiritual standing or his reputation, but he isn't safe. The prophet also shall stumble with you.

Then he brings this famous verse of verse 6 that many people recognize. You may have heard this verse before where God says, my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. See, when God's people are destroyed, when they waste away, it isn't because God has lost His love.

It isn't because God has lost His strength. It isn't because God doesn't see them. It's because His people lack knowledge.

I want you to notice something about this. First of all, it isn't that God says that His people are completely ignorant. He doesn't say, well, you don't know a thing.

You're as dumb as a post. God doesn't say that. He says they lack knowledge.

They have some, but not enough. They're probably in that dangerous place. And you know what I'm talking about when I say this.

They're probably in that dangerous play where they have just enough to make them think they know it all. A little bit of knowledge is a very dangerous thing, isn't it? You know just enough to think that you know it all. And so what kind of knowledge do they lack? When it says there in verse 6, my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, does it mean that they don't know enough about arithmetic? They don't know enough about civil engineering? That they don't know enough about ecology or science? No.

In the context, the first answer must be that they lack the knowledge of God. That's back at verse 1, right? They've abandoned the knowledge of God. They don't know Him.

They don't know His attributes. They don't know His character. And because they don't know God, they perish.

Perhaps they felt that they knew God well enough already. Friends, this is such a dangerous place for us to slip into. I don't think there's a single person in this room, myself included, who is not in danger of this every day.

You think you've got God pretty much figured out. I mean, you've done the Christian thing for a long time. You've heard a bunch of sermons.

You've read the Bible a bunch of times. You can hardly read a page of your Bible without saying, oh yeah, I've read this before, I recognize this. Well friends, you're in a dangerous place, because you might be in that place you think you've got God figured out.

Friends, you've got to realize, you don't know God well enough. And it doesn't matter to me if in God's eyes you have a triple PhD in the knowledge of God, there's more for you to know. There's more for you to learn.

You don't know His character and His nature and His attributes and His beauty the way that you fully can. The worst thing we can have is this self-satisfied smugness of feeling like, well, we've got God figured out pretty good. Friends, that's one aspect of knowledge that they don't have.

They need to know God more. But the second kind of knowledge they lack is the knowledge of God's Word. Look at it here.

It says in verse 6, My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, because you have rejected knowledge. I also will reject you from being priests for me, because you have forgotten the law of your God. I also will forget your children.

See how it flows right along with the context. They lack knowledge of God's Word. Now, again, they know God's Word some, perhaps a little, but not enough.

Perhaps they felt they knew God's Word well enough already. Again, I've already spoken to that, haven't I? Maybe you feel like, well, you know it. You've been through this before.

Yes, I know that very well. Friends, ask God to give you a set of new eyes. Ask God to give you a new heart.

And read the Bible as if you've never read it before. Maybe some of you need to take that favorite Bible of yours. Oh, you love it, don't you? You've got something written in every margin, in every little place.

And, oh man, it is your favorite Bible. And you love that Bible. Maybe some of you need to take that Bible.

You need to go put it up on the shelf. I didn't say get rid of it. Just put it up on the shelf.

And break out a brand new, clean one. Because you know that one that you've marked up so good? Well, you highlighted those passages you really like. And pretty soon, that's all you ever see anymore.

You don't even see that little word in the verse that you didn't highlight. You're just immediately drawn to what you've marked up before, what you've seen before. Friends, you can either do it physically with how you mark a page.

You can do it mentally with the way you read the Bible. But ask God to give you new eyes and a fresh heart and a fresh understanding. And you see, it wasn't that they had no knowledge of the Word, but that they lacked it.

It wasn't that they had no knowledge of God, but that they lacked it. Friends, I want you to see that when we know God for who He really is, it will affect our conduct. I was thinking about it today.

I was thinking about the connection between knowing God is and simply how we live. You know, think about the sins that people are prone to commit in secrecy. The man who sneaks away and looks at pornography.

The person who goes away and in private they would commit this sin, in public they never would. The person who, in the privacy of their home, they may speak in a blasphemous and a profane way. You'd never speak that way at church, would you? You would indulge in entertainments or in conversation or this, in privacy that you never would in public.

But you know what the problem is there? It's that you really don't know who God is. You don't know who God is. You say, well, I know who God is.

Well, apparently you're forgetting. Please, I'm speaking to myself here. Indulge me a little bit of, you know, rhetorical flourish when I put it in the you form.

You see, the issue here is that we've forgotten that God is omniscient, that He knows everything. What, do you think God is any less present in your home than He is in the church? That God can't see through the ceiling or the walls of your house? Well, of course He can. You forgot that God is all-knowing, that He's all-present? If we really knew that, if we really believed it, if we really grabbed hold of it in our life, then that would certainly change the way we live, wouldn't we? We'd realize that there's no such thing as secret.

We wouldn't feel any more alone when we're all by ourselves than we would in a crowd of a thousand people, because we know God's right there. See, it all comes back to the knowledge of God. But look at the danger here in verse six.

Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for me. Well, here we see who's responsible for the lack of knowledge among the people of God. It was the priest who rejected knowledge, the knowledge of God and His Word.

Now, teaching was a very important duty of the priests, and their neglect of it demonstrated what an important place that the pastor, the minister, the preacher has in presenting to God and His Word to the people. If the minister neglects his duty to preach the Word, then he can't lead the people in the true knowledge of God, and he will lead them into destruction. Look at it there in verse six.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. It's the man of God that's given the solemn responsibility for bringing people the Word of God. So what does God say to that unfaithful minister? Look at the end of verse six.

I will also forget your children. God will hold the unfaithful minister, pastor, preacher accountable. They'll have a lot to answer for before God.

And notice here, look at the futility of it all. Verse seven. The more they increase, the more they sinned against me.

I'll change their glory into shame. You see, God blessed the priests with increase, but they took God's blessing for granted, and they always sinned against Him all the more. You know, blessing is always a two-edged gift, isn't it? Because it's a wonderful thing to be blessed, but it also brings more accountability and more opportunity to sin.

Let's say that God blesses you, and I'll put that in quotation marks. Let's say God blesses you, and you win the lottery. And instantly, you're a millionaire.

Well, can I tell you that that's a two-edged gift? First of all, you say, oh, what a blessing it is! But first of all, now, where before, you just had your paycheck of accountability right now, now you're accountable for millions of dollars before God. You have much more accountability than you had before. And here's the other thing, you have much more opportunity to sin.

Now that you're a millionaire, you have opportunities to sin that you never had before. Well, it's a dangerous thing, isn't it? And the priest did not use it well. So, look at it here now in verse 9. And it shall be like people, like priests.

So I will punish them for their ways, and reward them for their deeds. For they shall eat, but not have enough. They shall commit harlotry, but not increase.

They have ceased obeying the Lord. You see, that's how it went. Like people, like priests.

The priests may have thought that they were immune from the judgment coming upon the Israel. Oh yes, Lord, You'll judge the people. It's the people, it's the people.

You know what God says when it comes to judgment? Like people, like priests. God promises that they will not be immune. There's also another way to understand the phrase, like people, like priests.

It also means that as the people go, so go the priests. You know, sometimes people expect their religious leaders to be holy for them, or to be holy instead of them. But since the priests come from the people, if the people are backslidden, then many backslidden men will become priests, so to speak.

Like people, like priests. Look at the futility of it. This is the futility of sin, verse 10.

For they shall eat, but they shall not have enough. They'll commit harlotry, but not increase. Because they have ceased obeying the Lord.

You see, they'll have, but it'll never seem to be enough. That's how it is when you're obstinate, rebellious against God. You can have more things than ever before, but nothing satisfies.

You know, satisfaction, contentment, that has nothing to do with how much you have. It has to do with where your heart is, and the blessing of God. Well, here they were in rebellion, and they didn't have it.

So look here, verse 11. Talking about the idolatry and spiritual adultery of Israel. Hosea speaks, and he says, Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart.

My people ask counsel from their wooden idols, and their staff informs them. For the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray, and they played the harlot against their God. They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks, poplars, and terebinths, because their shade is good.

Therefore, your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery. I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your brides when they commit adultery, for the men themselves go apart with harlots, and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. Therefore, people who do not understand will be trampled.

You see, Israel's idolatry was like adultery against the Lord. Every sacrifice to a pagan god was like an act of adultery against the faithful husband of Israel, the Lord God. You see, and the picture is especially striking if we take this analogy of a marriage, when we consider what a faithful and good husband the Lord is to His people.

Adultery is never excusable, but it's even more heinous when it's against a good, faithful, loving spouse. And that's how the Lord always was to Israel. But they turned their back on Him and went after other gods.

The picture is also striking when we consider how Israel wanted to add pagan gods to their worship of the Lord. You see, you have to understand how idolatry worked. It wasn't as if the people said, well, let's leave the Lord and let's go serve Baal.

No, no, that's never how it works. Satan's far too clever for that. He says, well, you worship the Lord, and you can keep on worshipping the Lord.

Let's just add the worship of Baal to it. Let's just add the worship of Baal to it. Let's just add the worship of Asherah to it.

You see, Israel only wanted to add the worship of pagan gods to their worship of the Lord, and God received this the same way that a husband would receive it. If his wife came home and said, well, I still want you to be my husband. I just want to take on a few more lovers also.

Well, the husband's not going to appreciate that. And neither did the Lord. You see, and if you notice here, it says in verse 14, for the men themselves go apart with harlots and offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot.

You see, describing idolatry as spiritual adultery is especially appropriate when we understand that many pagan gods were worshipped, so to speak, by the hiring of a ritual harlot. And might I say, that's far more enticing than just bowing down to a statue. That's what it was all about.

That's what the idolatry was about. Because the men were off doing that, did you notice what God says to the women and to the daughters and the wives? He says, I will not punish your daughters. I will punish your brides.

Because the men of Israel sinned this way, God wouldn't single the women of Israel out for judgment when it came to this sin. You know what I think is remarkable about this? God doesn't have a double standard when it comes to sexual conduct. One for men and one for women.

You know, that's how it is in the eyes of many people. Well, there's one standard of sexual conduct for women and then there's another one for men. You know, the men can play around.

That's just in their nature. It's just the way men are. Boys will be boys.

Well, but women, that's different. They should be to a higher standard. God doesn't see it that way.

He says everybody should be held to a higher standard, to the Lord's standard of purity and chastity. So notice the end result of it all. We come back to this again and again.

At the end of verse 14, Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled. It's the same idea from verse 6. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Without understanding God and His word, God's people are destined for destruction.

And look at verse 15. I love how God turns his focus now to Judah. Let's remember at this time that there was two different nations comprising the 12 tribes of Israel.

The 10 northern tribes made up the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom. Then the two southern tribes, Benjamin and Judah, made up the nation of Judah, where Jerusalem was. And so you had two different kingdoms.

And most of Hosea's prophecy is to the northern kingdom of Israel. But occasionally he turns his focus southward, and he says something to them too. Did you see what he says there in verse 15? Let not Judah offend.

I love that. You see, Israel's apostasy was far more ingrained. So Judah is cautioned, Don't follow your neighbor's sinful ways.

Don't come up to Gilgal. Don't come up to Beth-Avon. You see, those were centers of idolatry in Israel.

For a citizen of Judah to travel to one of these cities meant that they would share in Israel's idolatry. And God says, Don't do it. You know, when you get too close to sinful practices, they often rub off on you, don't you? Don't they? How about what it says in 1 Corinthians 15, 33? Do not be deceived.

Evil company corrupts good habits. Well, that's a hard one for us to accept, isn't it? But it's true. And God says, Listen, Gilgal, Beth-Avon, that's evil company.

Don't go there. It's interesting. Gilgal was once a place where prophets were trained.

In the days of Elijah and Elisha, there was a school of the prophets there at Gilgal. No more. And then there's funny, the name of the city, Beth-Avon.

Do you know there is no city Beth-Avon? There is none. Hosea is making a play on words. The city he's really talking about is Bethel, which means house of God.

But it wasn't fit to be called the house of God because it was a center of idolatry. So he calls it Beth-Avon. And Beth-Avon means house of deceit.

He won't even refer to it by its meaning. He'll say, You're not the house of God. You're the house of deceit.

Beth-Avon. It was a southern center of calf worship established way back in the days of Jeroboam I. So here's a summary of the charge, beginning here at verse 16. For Israel is stubborn, like a stubborn calf.

Now the Lord will let them forage like a lamb in open country. Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone. Their drink is rebellion.

They commit harlotry continually. Her rulers dearly love dishonor. The wind is wrapped her up in his wings.

And they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices. See the word of judgment in verse 17. Friends, it's sobering.

Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone. Well, you say, who's Ephraim? Ephraim was the largest tribe, both geographically and population-wise, in the northern kingdom of Israel. Therefore, many times it's just a shorthand way or a different way that God refers to the kingdom of Israel, calling them Ephraim.

Every time you see Ephraim in the book of Hosea, you could just write beside it Israel. That's all he's speaking about, the northern kingdom of Israel. So he says Israel is joined to idols, let him alone.

That's how God expresses his judgment. I'm going to judge Israel. I'm going to leave them alone.

On the one hand, you say, big deal. Boy, that's a scary judgment. God's going to leave me alone.

Many people wish God would leave them alone. Stop convicting me. Stop dealing with me, God.

Leave me alone. Can you imagine a criminal and the judge says, here's my sentence, son. The police and the courts are going to leave you alone.

He says, well, that's great. That's the best deal of all. How can it be a bad thing for God to leave us alone? And when God leaves us alone, we're in a lot of trouble.

You see, the mighty Assyrian army was soon going to come against Israel. And what does God say? I'll leave you alone. You can fight for yourself.

Go ahead. You against the Assyrian army. Go right ahead.

I won't fight for you. I'll leave you alone. You don't want me.

Go ahead. Fight for yourself. You know, friends, we don't want God to leave us alone.

Because we need him to protect us against our spiritual enemies. Do you realize what Satan wants to do to you? Oh, I know. We all moan and groan.

We feel like we're all so attacked, right? I'm so attacked. I'm so, oh, the attack, the attack. Well, you should see what the devil wants to do to you.

Remember what Jesus said to Peter? He said, Peter, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat. I was working the sifter in a kitchen the other day. And man, I would not want to be sifted like wheat.

That means you're getting thrashed pretty good. But what did Jesus say to Peter? He said, but I prayed for you. And so when you're restored, go and encourage my people, your brothers.

You see, Jesus prayed for Peter and he emerged victorious. You need God's protection. Now, how do you think Peter would have done if Jesus would have said, Peter, Satan has asked for you that he may sift you as wheat.

And I'm going to leave you alone. No, thank you. Peter was glad that Jesus didn't leave him alone.

That's not the only reason why we need the Lord to be with us and not leave us alone. We don't want God to leave us alone because we need him to protect us against ourselves. Friends, do you realize that left to ourselves with our own sinful hearts, we're surely going to drift away from the Lord.

Do you know all God has to do to make certain that a man goes to hell is leave him alone. Leave a man to himself and he's going straight to hell. No problem.

We follow our own sinful inborn inclinations because we're all children of Adam and daughters of Eve. Friends, when we do that, we're going right there. Our prayer should always be, Lord, don't leave me alone.

Keep working on me. You know, he gave a vivid picture of it in verse 16. Did you see that? For Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf.

Now the Lord will let them forage like a lamb in open country. We know cattle don't need much protection from the shepherd, do they? Not really. You don't see shepherds out with cattle because cattle aren't really very vulnerable to predators.

Oh, sure. You know, a lion or a bear could come along every once in a while. That's pretty unusual.

Cattle are not especially susceptible to predators. But sheep, that's another matter. Now, God says you go around acting like a stubborn calf, like a stubborn calf.

Cow. Oh, fine. I'll turn you out in the pasture just like I would a cow.

The problem is you're not a cow. You're a lamb. And when the lamb gets put out in the pasture, no shepherd, no nothing left alone, right? It's going to get consumed by a predator.

Oh, Lord God, don't leave me alone. Keep working on me. Take a look here now into chapter five.

Hear this, O priest, take heed, O house of Israel. Give ear, O house of the king, for yours is the judgment, because you've been a snare to Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor. The revolvers are deeply involved in the slaughter, though I rebuke them all.

I know Ephraim and Israel is not hidden from me. For now, O Ephraim, you commit idolatry. Israel is defiled.

And see again, now he's talking to the priests, to the sinful leaders of the nation, and he's rebuking them for the sinful state of the nation. And now in verse four, he talks about their double desolation. Take a look at it here.

Get the feel of the power of the prophet's statement here. He says they do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God. The spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the Lord.

The pride of Israel testifies to his face. Therefore, Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity. Judah also stumbles with them, with their flocks and herds.

They shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them. They have dealt treacherously with the Lord, for they have begotten pagan children.

Now a new moon shall devour their heritage. Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Cry aloud at Beth-Avon.

Look behind you, O Benjamin. Ephraim shall be desolate. In the day of rebuke among the tribes of Israel, I make known what is sure.

God giving a solemn warning of the judgment coming upon Israel. It would not be many years further than this, and the Assyrian army would come down and crush Israel with incredible brutality. It says there very strikingly in verse 5, the pride of Israel testifies to his face.

You know, like all rebellion, Israel's rebellion was centered on pride. They arrogantly thought that what God said didn't really matter compared to their own opinions and desires. My friends, if you see this, verse 6, it's very striking.

They shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find him. Get the picture there? You see, when God promised to leave rebellious Israel alone, it meant that when they made these superficial gestures of repentance, they wouldn't find him. And their repentance was superficial.

Look at it there back in verse 4, because they do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God. Lord, God protect us against the danger of superficial gestures of repentance. You know, in many ways today, people think that they're seeking God when really they're not at all.

It's just a superficial investigation. For example, a man might say, you know, I grew up in the Baptist church and I couldn't find God there. So I went to the Methodist church and I couldn't find God there.

Then I went to the Pentecostal church and I couldn't find God there. And then I went to the Presbyterian church and I couldn't find God there. And then I went to the Calvary Chapel and I couldn't find God there.

That man may imagine that he searched very hard after God. After all, he's ticked off all these different places on his shopping list, hasn't he? The truth is, is that man's running away from God. And when God started to get close to him at the Baptist church, he found a reason to leave.

And then when God started getting close to him at the Methodist church, he left. And when God started getting close to him at the Pentecostal church, or the Presbyterian church, or the Calvary Chapel church, you get the pattern, don't you? It's all following the same pattern. It's a superficial search for God that backs away when you start really getting close to him.

And so what happens? Look at it there at the end of verse 6. He has withdrawn himself from them. It can happen. We can be so set in our sin and rebellion that God just leaves us to ourselves.

And usually we don't even notice it first. Friends, when we call upon the Lord and then when we do not find him, then we start to see the result of pushing God away. Look at how they pushed God away in verse 10.

The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark. I'll pour out my wrath on them like water. Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment because he willingly walked by human precept.

Therefore, I will be to Ephraim like a moth and to the house of Israel like rotteness. When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah saw his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb. Yet he cannot cure you nor heal you of your wound.

You see, the princes of Judah, they were like those who remove a landmark. That means they would move the property lines. They were corrupted.

They didn't observe the boundaries. I can just imagine the people of Judah hearing Hosea's prophecy and being a little bit smug. Oh, yes, those great sinners in the northern nation of Israel.

Well, they should really get right with God like us down here in Judah. God says, no, no, Judah. There is work for you to get right with God.

And I'm sure that's what he said to me, too. You see, but the real sin of Ephraim, did you notice it there? In verse 11, Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment because he willingly walked by human precept. Ephraim sinned by living by man's standards and opinions instead of God's.

Now, you can't walk by human precepts unless you first reject God's precepts. And that's exactly what Israel did. They were foolish enough to trust in Assyria, the nation that would soon conquer them.

And so if you notice, how would God bring judgment? Did you notice that in verse 12? I'll be to Ephraim like a moth to the house of Judah like rotteness. I said, ooh, that's scary. God's going to be to me like a moth.

Oh, I'm really scared of a moth. Well, just wait till you open up your closet and see all your clothes eaten up. You see, the moth eats away at what you have.

It's subtle. It's secret. You don't notice it.

It's not like you're violently overtaken by a flock of moths or whatever they call a large gathering of moths. They don't nibble you to death. They eat away quietly, secretly.

You open up the closet and everything's gone. Everything's destroyed. God says, that's how I'm going to bring my judgment.

You're hardly going to know it and everything will be gone. That's not the only way he's going to bring his judgment. Look at it there in verse 14.

I will be like a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear them and go away. I will take them away and no one shall rescue.

I will turn again to my place till they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek my face. In their affliction, they will earnestly seek me.

You see, God's judgment will come against Israel also in big ways as well as small ways. Yes, sometimes he'll come against them like a moth. But then also he'll come against them in obvious, unmistakable ways.

You don't know when the moths are at work against you. You can't see it. But you know when the lion comes against you.

It's hard to miss that one. But you see, both a moth and a lion bring destruction just in different ways. See the very end of verse 15.

Then they will seek my face. In their affliction, they will diligently seek me. See, this was the whole goal of God's judgment against Israel.

The goal was not destruction, but restoration. Isn't it sad that sometimes it's only in our affliction that we earnestly seek the Lord? Well, why not seek him now? Why not seek the Lord right now and not make it to where the only time you'll seek him is in time of affliction? Let's conclude tonight with chapter 6. Look at this beautiful call to repentance in the beginning of the chapter. Come, let us return to the Lord.

For he is torn, but he will heal us. He is stricken, but he will bind us up. After two days, he will revive us.

On the third day, he will raise us up that we may live in his sight. Let us know. Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.

You know, Hosea prays with the right heart in response to the chastening hand of God. Instead of arguing with God, instead of resenting his correction, Hosea leads Israel in humble prayer. Lord, you've torn us,

but you'll heal us.

This is a prayer that trusts the love of God and sees the loving hand of his correction. You know, often a rebellious child will complain that the parents don't love them. You ever hear that from your kids when you have to correct them? You don't like me.

You don't love me. Well, of course, the parents love the child. But in the child's rebellion, in the child's lack of submission, they can't receive or respond to the love of the parent.

You can't receive love from somebody when you're rebelling against them. You can't receive love when you won't submit to them. And so Hosea doesn't have that kind of heart.

He says, well, you've torn, but you'll heal us. Isn't it beautiful how he says there in verse two, after two days, he will revive us on the third day. He will raise us up.

Hosea prayed this in full confidence of God's love and power to restore. And in the prayer, you see the shadowy prophecy of Jesus's resurrection on the third day. Isn't it beautiful in its context? You see, on the cross, Jesus was torn and stricken for our sake.

Yet he was also gloriously raised up on the third day. Look at it now in verse three. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.

His going forth is established as the morning. He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and the former rain to the earth. You see, Israel's problem was described back in Hosea 4.6, right? My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

And so Hosea leads the nation in a repentant correction of the problem. Look, if the problem is we didn't have the knowledge of the Lord, then let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. Friends, when you pursue the knowledge of the Lord, he blesses it.

But I have to tell you, it has to be more than a superficial sort of occasion. It has to be a real pursuit. But when you endeavor to know the Lord, especially through his word, he'll reveal himself to you.

Remember Hebrews 11.6, he who comes to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. That's what he's saying. Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord and he'll come to us.

Look at it there in verse three. He'll come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth. Remember that in Israel, the only way that crops were watered was by rain.

So the farmer waited with great anticipation for the rain. You see the farmer in Israel, he's waiting. He knows, he knows he can only rely on the rain.

That's it. He can't turn on the faucet. He can't hook up the rain bird.

He can't do any of that. All he has to do is sit and wait and wait until every day he's out there looking for the rain. It never leaves his mind, does it? He wakes up in the morning and he's thinking of the rain.

He goes to bed at night and he's thinking of the rain. Every day he's looking for that storm cloud out in the horizon. When's the rain going to come? That kind of expectancy, that kind of expectation, that kind of

reliance on the Lord.

God blesses it. God honors it. How often are we all really in that place? We wake up in the morning thinking, oh Lord, I want more of you.

You go to bed thinking, oh Lord, I want more of you. In everything you see through the day, you're looking for Lord, I want more of you. Just like that farmer waits for the early rain and the latter rain.

That's the kind of earnest expectation you should have. Might I say it's a repeated gift as well. He gives early rain, he gives latter rain and he gives it every year.

It comes, it comes in Israel, the early rains and the latter rains. No, God, God is still there. I can't help but read some Spurgeon here.

He says, notice again, it's a repeated gift. He said, give the former rain and the latter rain. If you have grace once given from the Lord, the Lord has more for you.

Did you have happy times and old doctor so and so was your pastor? Well, the doctor is dead, but God is not. Were you very much delighted when you used to sit in such and such a church and years gone by and you've moved into the country now? Yes, but God has not moved. He's in the country just as well as in the town.

You tell me you had such happy times when you were young. Yes, but God is neither younger nor older. Go to him for he's the same yesterday, today and forever.

Do you suppose that because he gave you the former rain that he's emptied the bottles of heaven? Of course he hasn't. So, Fran, he's given us all that provision. Notice here, he speaks again now in verse four.

Oh, Ephraim, what shall I do to you? Oh, Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud and like the early dew, it goes away. Therefore, I have hewn them by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth.

And your judgments are like light that goes forth. For I desire mercy and not sacrifice in the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. In the first three verses of Hosea 6, there's such a wonderful call to repentance.

It's like, yes, yes, this sounds great. But apparently the people didn't respond with sincerity of heart. Because God says, what shall I do to you? Judah, what shall I do to you? Your faithfulness is like the morning cloud and like the early dew, it goes away.

And sometimes you're driving and I'll be driving towards the ocean in the morning and you go through a valley like the Santa Rosa Valley and maybe back in a pocket of it. You'll have a thick layer of fog and then all of a sudden you'll drive and you'll be out of it. And then you'll just drive back maybe a half hour later and the fog will be gone.

It's been dissipated by the day's heat. You know, that's how some people's faithfulness to the Lord is. Their faithfulness, look at it there in verse four.

Your faithfulness is like a morning cloud and like the early dew, it goes away. Oh, God's not going to look and say there's no faithfulness. Oh yeah, there's faithfulness there.

It just lasts as much as the early morning fog does. It lasts as long as the early morning dew does. You see, what God really wanted was the heart.

Did you see verse six? For I desire mercy and not sacrifice and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. You see, at this time, God's people were still good at bringing sacrifices, right? He said, you come to me, you bring your sacrifices, but they had forsaken mercy and they abandoned mercy because they gave up the knowledge of God and the truth of God. God would rather have right hearts full of truth and mercy than sacrifices.

Jesus twice quoted this passage of Hosea to the religious leaders of his day because they also missed the heart of God and they focused on the wrong and superficial things. So look at it there again in verse six. For I desire mercy and not sacrifice and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Israel brought animals for sacrifice, but they never brought themselves as a living sacrifice. And they missed what God really wanted it to be all about. And that's a deep, close relationship with him.

You know, we can do the same thing today. You make sacrifices unto the Lord. I mean, you're here tonight.

This is a sacrifice you're making unto the Lord. You could be any number of places tonight. You've chosen to be here.

And God bless you for the sacrifice that you're making right now to be here. For instance, the sacrifice of the heart. You know, what God wants more than your seat in the chair is he wants your heart drawn up to him.

And it's nice that your seat is in the chair. But is your heart lifted up to him? You see, because what God really wants is the heart. And that's what Israel wouldn't give to him.

They bring the sacrifice, but not the heart. They would bring the gift to God, but they wouldn't pursue knowing God anymore. Like the guy who would come to church and oh, he writes out a big check, a big contribution.

He goes, here, Lord, here's my sacrifice to you. And God says, you know, thanks a lot, but I'd just like to talk with you sometime. Can't we get together and talk? Can't we get together and have some sweet fellowship? See how it all comes back to what we saw starting back in chapter four.

The crime of Israel is that there's no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. Well, let's conclude the chapter here, starting at verse seven. But like men, they transgressed the covenant.

They dealt treacherously with me. Gilead is a city of evildoers and is defiled with blood. As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man.

So the company of priests murder on the way to Shechem. Surely they commit lewdness. I've seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel.

There is harlotry of Ephraim. Israel is defiled. Also, oh, Judah, a harvest is appointed for you when I return the captives of my people.

You see the priests and pagan sacrifices. And when they turn to those places of pagan sacrifices, it was like a thieving, killing sin. Instead, God got appointed something different.

They'd be taken away in judgment. And when they returned, they would return to Judah. Did you see verse 11? Oh, Judah, a harvest is appointed for you when I return the captives of my people.

When the people of Israel were released from captivity, eventually they went back down to Judah. It wasn't until centuries later that the area of the northern part was ever really settled again. So the harvest of returned exiles was mainly for Judah, not for Israel.

Friends, do you catch the theme all through what we've seen here tonight? It's all about the knowledge of the Lord. You ever think of that phrase that Jesus said would happen on the day of judgment? He said that people would stand before him in the great time of judgment. They'd say, well, Lord, look at all the great things we did in your name.

Healed people, cast out demons. We did this. We did all.

We did so much in your name. Lord says that he would say to them, depart from me for I never knew you. And we know what he means by that, don't we? Not that God didn't know who they were.

God knew very well that there was never a relationship of knowledge and love. And, you know, the worst part about it is, is that when you have this relationship with God that maybe you've got a lot of sacrifice in it, you're good at the sacrifice, but you're not knowing God and not growing closer to him in a real relationship. You're missing out on the best part.

You really are. That's the cream. That's the beauty.

That's the best part of it all. God says, I want it for you. Come know the greatness of a real relationship with me.

Don't be satisfied with the superficial. Come for the knowledge of the Lord. Father, that's where we come to you tonight.

We simply ask, Lord, that you'd give each and every one of us a passion for knowing you. Make us, Lord, totally unsatisfied with anything other than knowing you and growing in the knowledge of you. Let truth and mercy and your glorious boundaries just be established in our life through that knowledge.

We pray this, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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