

(Hosea) Drawn With Gentle Cords

by David Guzik

God's blessings can be used for either good or evil, and it is our responsibility to use them in a way that glorifies Him.

Duration: 53:49

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6, Hosea 10:13-15, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Israel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the book of Hosea and expresses disappointment that they were unable to finish it in this session. The speaker mentions upcoming events, including a fasting seminar, and encourages the audience to take a look at what's happening. The main focus of the sermon is on the humbling realization that we cannot return to God without His help. The speaker also highlights God's heart of love and mercy, as seen in His willingness to sacrifice His son, Jesus Christ, for our salvation.

Transcript

Hosea chapter 10, the best thing to do is to just jump right into it tonight and see how the prophet Hosea prophesies, mainly to here tonight, the northern kingdom of Israel, although the southern kingdom of Judah will also be included in a few spots. Hosea chapter 10, beginning at verse 1, Israel empties his vine. He brings forth fruit for himself.

According to the multitude of his fruit, he has increased the altars. According to the bounty of his land, they have embellished his sacred pillars. Their heart is divided, now they are held guilty.

He will break down their altars, he will ruin their sacred pillars. Now I want you to notice this. Israel brought forth fruit because God blessed them.

That's what it says in verse 1, Israel brought forth fruit. But what for himself? Hosea ministered during a time of tremendous material abundance in the northern kingdom of Israel. Several of the kings of this period seemed to be skilled politically in setting economic policy and developing things in the nation, but it was a moral and a spiritual time of catastrophe.

And so during this period, they brought forth fruit, but for what? For themselves. God blessed Israel with material abundance, but they spent it on themselves and on their own idolatrous desires. Did you see what it said there in Hosea chapter 10, verse 1, where it says, according to the bounty of his land, they

have embellished his sacred pillars.

And then previous to that, they say they increased the altars, and that means the altars unto the pagan gods. And so Israel enjoyed the blessing of God, but they used those blessings in ungodly ways. You know, it's a wonderful thing to be blessed of the Lord.

But anytime God blesses us in any way, with any time, with any talent, with any ability or privilege or resource, we have a responsibility to use it in a way that glorifies God. You know, Paul warned against the same thing in Galatians chapter 5. He said, for you, brethren, have been called to liberty, only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh. Sometimes we think, well, God set me free, isn't it wonderful? But then we use that freedom just for ourselves.

No, we can't take the liberty and the blessing that God gives us and use it in an ungodly way. Now, look at how God describes the sinful state of Israel, where it says there in verse 2, their heart is divided, now they are held guilty. Because Israel had received blessing, they were more responsible than ever to use it wisely.

And because they used God's bounty in these wicked ways, look at what he says he'll do at the end of verse 2. He will break down their altars, he will ruin their sacred pillars. It's a very interesting phrase in the ancient Hebrew, where it says, their heart is divided. The ancient Hebrew word there for divided can also be translated smooth or flattering.

There are different places in Psalms and in Proverbs where it speaks about a person who has smooth lips or a flattering tongue. It's the same Hebrew word there. It may be accurate to translate this phrase as their heart is smooth or flattering.

They may be speaking of an insincere heart. The same idea is reflected back previously in the book of Hosea. Do you remember that whole picture that God painted with Hosea's unfaithful wife named Gomer? She had an insincere love for her husband Hosea.

Oh yes, I love you. Oh yes, I'm committed to you. While all the time she was committing adultery.

You see, Israel had the same divided, insincere heart towards the Lord, and they expressed it on the altars of idolatry. So now God says, I'm going to break down your altars. They should have done it themselves.

They should have broken down the altars themselves. But God says, well no, you wouldn't do it in consecration to me, so now I'll do it in power and in judgment against you. It's very interesting in our lives, and I've experienced this, I don't know if you have, where God asks you to give something up to him.

Give it up to me. Give it up to me. This is wrong in your life.

It's an idol. It's an idolatrous altar. It has no place in your life.

Give it up to me, the Lord says, and we don't. We delay, we harden, we whistle while God speaks to us. Anything we can do.

And then finally God says, well, you won't give it. I'll take it. It's always worse, isn't it? It hurts worse when the Lord takes it in his chastening hand.

But it's better to have it gone from us than to have it there. So friends, if the Lord is speaking to your heart and saying, give it, give it, give it, how many times is he going to say it? How many times will he say, give me this altar, where he says, well, you wouldn't give it, now I'm going to break down that altar. You don't want him to break it down.

Break it down yourself. Give it to him. Israel would not do that.

So the Lord said that he would break down their altars. Well, he also broke down the political structure of the nation. Verse three, for now they say we have no king because we did not fear the Lord.

And as for a king, what would he do for us? They've spoken words, swearing falsely and making a covenant. Thus judgment springs up like hemlock in the furrows of the field. The inhabitants of Samaria fear because of the calf of Beth-Avin.

For its people mourn for it, and its priests shriek for it, because its glory has departed from it. The idol shall also be carried to Assyria as a present for King Jereb. Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.

As for Samaria, her king is cut off like a twig on the water. Also the high places of Avon, the sin of Israel shall be destroyed. The thorn and the thistle shall grow on their altars.

They shall say to the mountains, cover us, and to the hills, fall on us. You see, under the judgment of the Lord, these foreign powers dominated Israel and removed their kings. And even the idols they honored and trusted so much.

This calf that they set up in the city of Beth-Avin, God said, I'm going to take that. The priests of the calf worship. Can you imagine setting up a calf and worshiping it? How absurd.

The Israeli farmer, there he is. He just gets done plowing his field behind a calf. He hooks up the plow to it and he drags it behind it.

And then he goes back and he milks another cow. And there he is, he's got cows all around him. And then he goes over and what does he do? He worships a statue of a cow.

You worship this thing that was just working for you. It was just pulling your plow. And God says, the priests, the people that serve it, they're all going to be wailing.

Because even that will be carried away in judgment. And instead, if you notice here, it says, the thorn and the thistle shall grow on their altars. After the desolation of exile, those once busy pagan altars of Israel, they're now overgrown with thorns and thistles.

This is the result of Israel's rejection of the Lord and their embrace of the pagan gods. Now look here, beginning at verse 9. God's going to counsel Israel what to do. He says, O Israel, you've sinned from the days of Gibeah.

There they stood in the battle of Gibeah against the children of iniquity, did not overtake them. When it is my desire, I will chasten them. People shall be gathered against them when I bind them for their two transgressions.

Israel is, excuse me, Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh grain. But I have harnessed her fair neck. I will make Ephraim pull a plow.

Judah shall plow. Jacob shall break his cloths. Basically, God wants Israel to see their sinful state.

That's what he says in verse 9. Israel, you've sinned from the days of Gibeah. Gibeah was already mentioned in the prophet Hosea back in chapter 9. The city of Gibeah would just bring forth a stomach-churning reaction for any Israelite of that period because they remembered hundreds of years before, as recorded in the book of Judges chapter 19, there was an occasion of horrific sin and judgment that the Lord poured out upon Israel at Gibeah. And even though there was a battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity, as Hosea says, there still was iniquity in Israel.

And God says, listen, you're willfully blind to your sin, Israel. Look at it and repent of it. Then he says, when it's my desire, if you notice it there, when it is my desire, verse 10, then I will chase in them.

Like unruly farm animals, God will guide Israel and Jacob. Even if they kick against them, he will chase in them. So look at verse 12.

This is a wonderful verse in the book of Hosea. He says, sow for yourselves righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till he comes and rains righteousness on you. Sow for yourselves in righteousness and reap in mercy.

Israel had sown the seed of sin and soon they would reap judgment from the Lord. But even now, if they would begin to sow righteousness, they would reap in mercy at the next harvest. You know, every one of our lives is if we're sowing, we're out casting seeds.

There you are, you're walking around every day. You woke up this morning and you put a pile over your shoulder, a big sack of seeds. And you walked around all day long and you were casting out seeds.

Now, were they seeds of righteousness or were they seeds of wickedness? Maybe you ignored God today. You didn't give him a second thought. Why the Lord even tried to burst into your day.

You turned on the car and there it was. It was the Christian radio. And then some guy was teaching on there and you didn't want to hear it, so you turned it off.

And you're going, God tried to speak to your heart, your mind today, and you wouldn't have any of it. And somebody came up to you and they wanted to know something. They almost virtually came up, what must I do to be saved? And you wanted nothing to do with it.

Well, you were sowing seeds today, weren't you? But they were seeds of wickedness. What crop is going to grow up from those seeds planted today? You think about it right now. The seeds you cast out today, they're going to grow up.

What kind of crop is going to grow up? How about the seeds over the last week? How about the seeds over the last month or last year? Oh, many of us were sowing seeds of wickedness. And then we come home and in a dramatic prayer we go, God, don't let those seeds grow up, Lord, please. Well, no.

Instead the answer is you sow for yourselves righteousness. Then you'll reap in mercy. Start sowing the righteous seed.

Go ahead and put that sack around. You're sowing the seed everywhere. Sow righteous seed.

But for some of us it even begins even earlier. Even before we can sow that righteous seed, we have to do what? Look at verse 12. Break up your fallow ground.

You know what fallow ground is? It's ground that has not been cultivated for more than a year. Through four seasons. Summer has passed.

The fall has passed. The winter has passed. The spring has passed.

And nothing's been done with the field. It hasn't been plowed. It hasn't been watered.

It hasn't been planted. It's become hard. Weeds are everywhere.

Now, what would happen if you go and you just start sowing seed upon that fallow ground? What's going to happen to it? Nothing. Oh, by chance a seed or two might sprout up. But it'd be nothing of the crop that it could be.

What do you have to do before the fallow ground can bear anything? You have to break up the fallow ground. Oh, but it's stubborn. It's resistant, isn't it? The field has been plowed regularly.

Well, then when you get the plow behind it, it works very good. But the fallow ground, it's a lot of work to plow that up, isn't it? If you could hear the fallow ground, it would say, Stop, you're hurting me. Ow, this hurts.

I'm too hard. Friends, it does little good to sow the seed on fallow ground. You have to break it up first so that the seed can penetrate.

And it will become fruitful. And even if the fallow ground doesn't want to be broken up, it says, I'm too hard. I'm too compact.

The blade of the plow, it hurts as it cuts through. If that fallow ground could talk, it would probably cry and scream as the plow goes through it. Yet it's useless as ground as long as it is fallow.

If it's going to be fallow, you may as well pave it over and make it a parking lot. It's never going to bear fruit. But look at it here.

It says in verse 12, Sow for yourselves righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord. That's how you break up the fallow ground. Seek the Lord.

Don't seek self. Don't seek idols. Why have you come here tonight? To seek yourself? To seek something good for yourself? Have you come to seek the Lord? Lord, just let me meet you.

Let me meet you in worship. Let me meet you in prayer. Let me meet you in your word.

Don't you love what it says there too? He says, for it is time to seek the Lord. When is the time to break up the fallow ground? Now. It is time.

Can you see the farmer here? He's got that stretch of fallow ground. He's wondering, what? You know, I don't know if it's time to break it up or not. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.

I don't know. I'll have to think about it for a day. Well, maybe next week.

Maybe in a month. And all of a sudden, spring has passed into summer, and summer has passed into fall, and then he can't plant. You're out of season.

Well, then I'll just let it with. No sense in rushing into it now. I can't plant anyway.

And time after time, that whole procrastination thing gets going. And then, no, no, now. Now it is time.

How long do you do it? How long do you sow unrighteousness? How do you know that it's been prepared? How do you know that you need to keep sowing unrighteousness? Look, it's at the end of verse 12. Till he comes and rains righteousness on you. Well, that's how long you should break up the fallow ground and sow the seed of righteousness.

You do it until the harvest comes. God uses the figures of sowing and reaping in a way that reminds us that the harvest is sometimes a season away. Sometimes people expect to sow in sin for years and years.

But then they expect, I'm going to sow unrighteousness for one day. And now where's my harvest? I want it now, Lord. But God says, look, keep doing it.

Do it, he says in verse 12, till he comes and rains righteousness on you. Stick with it. Stick with sowing unrighteousness and you're going to reap in mercy in due time.

It's a season away. The harvest is a season away. You keep sowing the seed and God will bring it forth.

What if you don't? What if you keep resisting? Well, look at verse 13. You have plowed wickedness. You have reaped iniquity.

You have eaten the fruit of lies because you trusted in your own way. In the multitude of your mighty men, therefore, tumult shall arise among your people and all your fortresses shall be plundered. As shall men plundered Beth Arbel in the day of battle, a mother dashed in pieces upon her children.

Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great wickedness. In a morning, the King of Israel shall be cut off utterly. Why? Why this judgment? Why this desolation upon Israel? You saw it right there, didn't you, in those verses? Because you trusted in your own way.

Verse 13. This is the essence of all sin, isn't it? You trust in your own way. Remember that great passage in Proverbs 3, verses 5 and 6? Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

Lean not unto your own understanding. Be not wise in your own eyes. But trust in the Lord.

That's the key there, isn't it? It's to not go your own way. It's not to trust your own way. Because when you do trust your own way, that's the essence of sin.

Ruin always comes when we trust in our own way instead of God's way. And that ruin was about to come upon Israel, but God wasn't going to let them go without a fight. Look at it here, chapter 11, verse 1. When Israel was a child, I loved him.

And out of Egypt I called my son. As they called them, so they went from them. They sacrificed to the Baals and burned incense to carved images.

Notice this, won't you? Notice it. I loved him. And out of Egypt I called my son.

God remembers his tender love for Israel when more than 500 years before the time of Hosea, he brought them out of Egypt. You want to see how interesting the Bible can be sometimes? Keep your finger here in Hosea chapter 11 and turn, if you will, to Matthew chapter 2. Now, Hosea chapter 11, verse 1 says, out of Egypt I called my son. I don't know if any of you did.

Perhaps you can tell me after our time together here this evening if you did, but I'd be interested to know if any of you recognize that that's a Messianic prophecy right there. Out of Egypt I've called my son. Well, Messianic prophecy? Look for yourself, Matthew chapter 2, verse 15, where we read, well, let's start at verse 14.

When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, out of Egypt I called my son. Isn't that interesting? That obscure little line from the prophet Hosea turns out to be a wonderful little prophecy of part of the life of Jesus Christ coming forth from Egypt after they had escaped there on the eve of Herod's massacre of the innocents. Now, if you notice back here in the book of Hosea, though, it was true not only of Jesus prophetically, but it was true of Israel historically.

And he had called them from Egypt, and he called them his son. If you notice, it says, and as they called them, so they went from them. They sacrificed to the Baals.

God called Israel out of Egypt, but it's as if the idolatry of the Baals called to Israel, and they forsook the Lord, and they followed the Baals, that is the local deities of Canaan. But did God stop loving them? No. Look at verse 3. I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them.

I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them. Did you notice this? I taught them how to walk, but they did not know that I healed them.

God does so much for His people that they're completely unaware of. Think about all the things that God did for you today that you have no clue of. You didn't even know that He did it.

Well, there it was, you know, a few minutes before you were on your way here to church, there was a car speeding down the road, just out of control. Maybe the driver had a little bit too much to drink, and there it was just zooming down the road, and wham! He ran the red light! And there you were. You couldn't find your keys at the house.

And you were so mad. You were just boiling. I can't find my keys.

What did the kids do with my keys? What did I set upon them? And there you are. You're virtually swearing. Oh, you're so angry because you can't find your keys.

And you're saying, I'm going to be late to Bible study, and I've got to get going along in the way. How can I make it there on time? And finally, you get out of the house, and you get going, and you're just boiling. And you don't know.

Well, God arranged it that you couldn't find your keys and were delayed, because if you were on your normal timing, you would have been right in the way of that car that ran the red light. You never knew. God preserved you, but you never knew it.

How could you know it? How could we know in a day all the things that the Lord keeps us from? All the ways that Satan has plotted our destruction, or as he said about Peter, to sift us as wheat, but we've been delivered from them. It's a glorious, glorious thing, but we may never know. Oftentimes we attribute some blessing coming directly from the hand of God to some other source.

There's the man who's worked very hard, and he's very successful, and he's making a lot of money, and isn't it wonderful? It's just great. And yet, well, you know, yes, he's grateful to God, but he thinks he did it. No.

It was the Lord. It came from his hand. He healed you.

He blessed you. Do you know it? But it gets even more tender here. Look at it here in verse 3. I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms.

Parents, you know how it was when you're training your little child to walk. Maybe the child's just a year old and can hardly make steps, but you hold them by their hands up high like that, you know, and the child, and they just kind of totter along like this and along, and they can't really walk, but you're just kind of trying to get some strength and some balance in their legs, and it's so fun, isn't it? Isn't it so fun to do that with a child? And you say, look, look, darling, he's walking, you know, and then the child's not walking at all. They're saying, well, it's so wonderful to see it.

I would dare say that you'll hardly ever see a parent doing that with their child, holding them by the arms and teaching them how to walk, but the parent doesn't have a huge smile on their face. Teaching them how to walk, and God says, that's what I did with you. You know, those first awkward steps you made in your Christian life.

Oh, you were so bold. You thought you had it all wired. You know, you're just so excited about Jesus, and you did many foolish things in your enthusiasm.

God just smiled. He thought it was sweet. He thought it was wonderful.

And there he is, holding your hands, holding your arms, just walking you along. But then if you notice, he says, I am not even going to end there. And even those with those expressions of the tender, giving parental love of God.

Verse 4, he says, I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love. You know, even when God draws his people, he draws them with gentle cords of love, not with harsh manipulation or coercion. God isn't the one saying, hey, you, get here now.

I'm going to drag you to me. I'm sick and tired of your business, mister. I'm dragging you here.

No. God wants to win us over, but not with brute force. Some commentators believe that these gentle cords have the idea of almost like a little leash that you'd use on a child to help train it how to walk in the ancient world.

And it's God just helping them to walk, giving them a little cord to lean on and to hold on to, helping them to walk. The whole idea is that God draws us along with these gentle cords of love. You know, he has every right to just overwhelm us and coerce us, doesn't he? Every right.

Well, who would protest against it? Who's going to stand for it and say, well, God, you have no right to treat me like that. You have no right to make me do that. Well, God has every right to make you do it.

He's the potter. You're the clay. He's the creator.

You're the creature. He'd make you do whatever he wants to do. But he doesn't.

He says, I'm going to draw you. In the ancient world, the empires of Persia and Greece, they fought bitter, bitter wars against each other. But there was said to be a great difference between the soldiers of Persia and the soldiers of Greece.

It's said that the soldiers of Persia were driven into battle like slaves, that their commanding officers had whips, had sticks that they would poke them with and say, you fight or we're going to whip you. We're going to beat you. But in the Greek army, soldiers were free men.

They were patriots. They fought for Sparta and for Greece out of love for country and a sense of duty. And you know, the smaller armies of Greece almost always beat the larger armies of Persia because they were free men.

God calls us as an army of free men and women, grateful patriots of the kingdom of God. That's what we are, aren't we? We're patriots of the kingdom of God. We're here saying, Lord, we're your soldiers and freely we've enlisted in your service.

You've drawn us with cords of love. You have every reason just to draft us and make no choice. But here we are, Lord.

We're a choice. We're a volunteer army. We are patriots and we will fight for you.

If you notice, it continues on. It's just tender image after tender image. Verse 4, it says, I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck.

I stooped and fed them. The idea here is of an animal straining against the yoke all day long and plowing and it's sort of constricting them and they can hardly breathe and they can't get a good breath. And so God says, I come along and I loosen the yoke.

Now you can breathe. Well, now you can eat something. There it is.

And God says, No, let me stoop down and feed you. Isn't that beautiful? God's tender love, His care. Oh, if we could only see how tenderly the Lord has cared for us today.

You know, He did. You know, Jesus prayed for you today. He prayed for you so tenderly.

You ever hear those angry prayers that sometimes people pray? I've prayed angry prayers. You know, when the Lord has prayed for you, it's never been an angry prayer. It's a prayer full of love and tenderness.

He cares about you. He wants to strengthen you. He wants to build you up and encourage you.

He stoops down to feed you. That's how much God humbles Himself to minister to His needy people. Well, listen, God knows it's beneath your dignity to do this.

But God never thinks so. He says, I'll stoop to feed them. I'll take care of them.

I'll love them as a parent. I'll draw them with these gentle cords, with the bands of love. That's how much God loves you.

And notice here, when all that is rejected, verse 5, He shall not return to the land of Egypt, but the Assyrians shall be His king because they refuse to repent. And the sword shall slash in His cities, devour His districts, and consume them because of their own counsels. My people are bent on backsliding from Me.

Though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him. See, friends, this is the problem. The problem is that though God has shown us this amazingly tender love, sometimes our hearts are just bent on backsliding against Him.

Sometimes we, like Israel, it says right here, we refuse to repent. Look at that phrase. Verse 5, because they refused to repent.

I want to suggest to you that your sin isn't the problem. What is your sin before God? I could start listing off a little laundry list of sin right now and hope that one of them hits something in your life. But let's just say it's sin.

You know what it is in your life. I'm going to suggest to you tonight that that sin isn't the primary issue. It's your refusal to repent of that sin.

That's what it is. You refuse to repent. In this sense, it wasn't so much the sin of Israel that got them into trouble, it was their stubborn refusal to repent after their sin.

And for that, God would make sure that destruction and exile waited for them. Why? Because look at it there. Verse 7, my people are bent on backsliding from me.

That's what they want to do. You know, sometimes we want to excuse our backsliding as if it just kind of happened to us. You know, I was walking down the street one day.

Whoa! I backslid. Oh, there it was. It was like a bar of soap on the ground.

Whoops! There I go. I'm backslidden. Look at it.

My people are bent on backsliding from me. How refreshing it is just to come to the refreshing truth to say, I am backslidden because my sinful heart wanted it. God set me free from my inclination to backslide.

The Lord can deal with a heart like that. Look at what it says there at the end of verse 7 where He says, They call to the Most High, or though they call to the Most High, none at all exalt Him. You see, all of the times where they had a real walk with God, they backslidden from that place and now their profession is simply empty.

Sure, they call to the Most High, but it's in a very formal kind of way. They don't really exalt Him with their lives. Yet God has sympathy for Israel even in the midst of chastening.

Look at verse 8. How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Edmah? How can I set you like Zeboiham? My heart churns within me. My sympathy is stirred. I will not execute the fierceness of my anger.

I will not again destroy Ephraim for I am God and not man. The Holy One in your midst. And I will not come with terror.

You see, though the dark clouds of judgment on the horizon, God takes no pleasure in the chastening that's about to come upon Israel. Instead, He says, my sympathy is stirred. That's what's stirred in God.

Isn't this beautiful? Look at it in verse 8. How can I give you up, O Ephraim? You know, we're all in sin before God. But God looked at you, a sinner. He looked at me.

And He said, how can I give you up? We just deserve to be let go on our own way to hell. Let Him go. As if the disobedient child, the wayward child, says, oh, we'll just cut Him loose.

Let Him go. Let Him go their own way. You don't have to care.

But the father of the prodigal son wouldn't do that, would he? Oh, he'd let him go on his way. But every night he was there looking out for the return of his son. Every night he waited.

Every night he thought about the party he would throw when the son came back. Every night he was preparing for it. He says, how can I give you up? You see, justice demands that God bring His judgment, bring His chastening.

Yet in his heart, he must find a way of salvation. And in this, God sent His Son, Jesus Christ. And on the cross, Jesus was given up in our place.

How can I give you up? God says, I don't want to. You're my child. I'll sacrifice my son in your place.

You see, that's the heart of God. He says, I will not again destroy Ephraim. Though their sin deserves it, God will not wipe out Israel.

He's going to leave a remnant. And He'll restore the nation. And just to emphasize the point, look at it there.

In verse 9 he says, I will not execute the fierceness of my anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and not man. This should give us tremendous comfort.

You know, whenever you're talking about the forgiveness of the Lord, and the Lord says, I'm God and not man, you should say, thank you, Lord. Because the long-suffering, the forgiveness, the compassion of the Lord towards His people, well, it seems unbelievable until we recognize that He is not man, but He's God. His love and His forgiveness are of a completely different order.

There are many differences in the way that God forgives and the way that man forgives. You should be very thankful that the Lord does not forgive the way that we do. You know, man cannot hold back his anger very long.

How many of us? Well, you know, they did it once and I let it go and they did it twice and that's all three times. That's it, mister. That's it.

Well, aren't you glad that God counts to more than three with us? Where would we be? Once, twice, three. We'd be gone. A man cannot bear with others when he's tired or stressed or annoyed.

You know how you get. You're all tired. You're all cranky.

You're all annoyed and stressed. Woe to the person who crosses you then, right? Boy, I know I'm like that. Sometimes it's just like if I'm tired, if I'm stressed out, it's like you don't want to mess with me.

Sometimes I've told that to my children. Now is not a good time for you to be acting up like this. Daddy cannot be held responsible for his actions.

It's been a bad day for Daddy. You know, God is never like that. Never! Never like that! Can you imagine if you prayed and God says, it's not a good time for that now.

You're just never going to hear it from the Lord. You know, man will not reconcile if the person who offended him is a person of bad character. So somebody offends you, somebody wrongs you in a terrible way, and you say, they're such a low life, I'm not going to forgive them.

Well, they're not even sorry about what they did. I'm not going to forgive them. What a low life! Why don't you glad the Lord doesn't do it the same way towards us? Wouldn't he have everybody say, what a low life! I'm not going to forgive them.

I'll find some better person to forgive. Man is often only willing to be reconciled if the offending party really wants to be forgiven and if they initiate it. Oh, isn't that how we are? Well, I'll forgive them, you know, but they'd better come to me, hat in hand, asking for forgiveness.

That's not how God is. No, not at all. Not one bit.

Man, even when he does reconcile, he doesn't lift the former offender to a place of high status and partnership. Could you imagine that? Forgiving somebody the way that God forgives us. There you are, and you're going down the way and a guy crashes into you with his car.

Oh, it's totally his fault. But he comes out and he's some fancy-pants lawyer and he wants to sue you to kingdom come. Oh, and he takes you to court and he puts you through all this business and all this boulder and all this.

Now, even if you could find it in your place to forgive him. Okay, God, I forgive him. What are you going to say? Hey, come on over to my house for Christmas.

Let's just hang. Matter of fact, let's be partners. Let's go in together on a business arrangement.

You'd never do that. It's not in the way of man. It's in the way of God.

He looks at us, the ones he's forgiven, the ones who have offended him so greatly, and he says, not only am I going to forgive you, I'm going to lift you up to high status. You come into business. Come on.

I've got a kingdom I want to advance. And you come and be a partner with me in that. We shake our heads and we go, God.

And then man, man, when he is wronged, he will never bear all the penalty for the wrong done. Well, think about that. You know, I wrong you.

Or let's say this. Let's say you wrong me. And then I hear you've wronged me and it's my job to get together and you're all in the wrong.

Let's say, well, we'll reconcile if I'll take all the blame. Wait a minute. I didn't do a thing.

You got that here? Not a thing. And we can only be reconciled if I take all the blame? Forget that. We just wipe our hands and dust our feet off and walk away.

Don't you realize that's exactly what Jesus did on the cross? He said we can be reconciled, but the innocent one will take all the blame. All the blame? That's exactly what he did for us. You know, man, when he attempts reconciliation, he won't continue if he's rejected.

You ever been in that place? Well, okay, you know, somebody's wronged you and you go to make reconcile and you go in there and you're getting it all together with them and everything and then they push you away. And then how is it when they push you away? You're secretly glad, aren't you? Because you're like, well, I can tell everybody I tried. And they didn't want to have anything to do with me.

Goodbye. You know, I have nothing to do with you. You rejected my gesture of reconciliation.

How would you like it if the Lord did that to us? The first time we reject his gesture of reconciliation towards us, he says, well, then forget it. Bye. See ya.

How many times did we push away the Lord before we finally gave in to him? Man will not restore an offender without a period of probation, will he? We're big on probation. Well, yeah, sure. You know, I'll forgive you, but I've got to keep my eye on you.

I'm not going to trust you. That's the way it is in the mind and the heart of man, not with God. There's no probation period with God.

If any of you feel tonight that you're on probation before the Lord, you're not. You're free. Probation's up.

You were never on it. God accepts you fully by faith in Jesus Christ. Man will not love and adopt and honor and associate with one who's wronged him, but God will.

You see that? All that in this little verse right there in verse 9, for I am God and not man. God's way of forgiving. God's way of reconciling.

It's so different than ours. Well, God says He's going to call Israel back. Look at it here.

Verse 10. They shall walk after the Lord. He will roar like a lion.

When He roars, then His sons shall become trembling from the west. They shall come trembling like a bird from Egypt, like a dove from the land of Assyria. And I will let them dwell in their houses, says the Lord.

Ephraim has encompassed me with lies and the house of Israel with deceit. But Judah still walks with God, even the Holy One who is faithful. Here it speaks of the ultimate restoration of Israel, an expression of His mercy and His care for Ephraim.

And God says, I know your current state. I know that Ephraim has encircled me with lies. Though I know this, I will still make these promises of reconciliation.

Let's finish up here with chapter 12 tonight. Ephraim feeds on the wind and pursues the east wind. He daily increases lies and desolation.

Also, they make a covenant with the Assyrians and oil is carried to Egypt. You see, the idols and the foreign alliances that Israel trusted in were useless. They were like trying to feed on the wind.

They made deals with the Assyrians. They made deals with the Egyptians. Anything to buy them some time or to play one superpower off the other, it was going to come to nothing.

We're going to hear verse 2 now. The Lord also brings a charge against Judah and will punish Jacob according to his ways, according to his deeds. He will recompense him.

He took his brother by the heel and the womb and in his strength he struggled with God. Yes, he struggled with the angel and prevailed. He wept and sought favor from him.

He found him in Bethel and there he spoke to us. That is the Lord God of hosts. The Lord is his memorial.

So you, by the help of your God, return. Observe mercy and justice and wait on your God continually. You know, here God looks back at the patriarch Jacob and how Israel was in Hosea's day.

It was just like Jacob was in the days of the book of Genesis. He said, you caught your brother's heel in the womb. You know, in ancient Hebrew, a heel catcher was like a con man, was like a deceiver, a tricker.

And now God says, well, that was how it was then and that's how Israel is now. You're a dishonest dealer with me. In his strength he struggled with God.

Here the prophet recalls the struggle between Jacob and the man of Genesis chapter 32. Jacob refused to submit to God, so God demanded submission from him in a literal wrestling match. The same thing we spoke of earlier tonight.

Jacob wouldn't give surrender to God, so God said, I'm going to come take it. So he struggled with God. And he struggled with the angel that is the angel of the Lord God appearing in a human or an angelic form.

And he prevailed. Did you notice what it says there? In verse 4 it says he struggled with the angel and prevailed. How did Jacob prevail? Did he beat him in the wrestling match? No.

He prevailed because he won. The only way you can win when you struggle with God. You win by losing and recognizing you've lost and then clinging on for whatever blessing God will give you in His mercy.

You prevail with God when you lose and know it and surrender to God. And there's a beautiful detail that Hosea fills in here by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the book of Genesis does not even tell us. It says that he wept and sought favor from... Jacob was crying like a baby holding on to the angel holding on to the man that wrestled with him the Lord God Himself.

Tears flowing down from his cheeks. I will not let go until you bless me. This shows us how desperate and broken Jacob was as he hung on to the Lord.

He pleaded only for a blessing. And so now what's the application? Look at it here in verse 6. It says, So you, by the help of your God, return. Jacob came to the place where a new God had beaten him.

All he could do was hang on and plead for a blessing. And it says, So you, Israel, you do the same thing. Isn't that humbling to read that in verse 6? So you, by the help of your God, return.

We would like to think that at least we're spiritual enough that we can return to God all on our own. Thank you very much, Lord. I can return to you.

God says, no. You can't even return to me without my help. Isn't that humbling? There's nothing we can do before God that pleases Him without the help of the Lord.

In verse 7, the scene shifts and judgment is promised against an overconfident Israel. It says here in verse 7, A cunning Canaanite. Deceitful scales are in his hand.

He loves to oppress. And Ephraim said, Surely I become rich. I found for myself wealth.

In all my labors, they shall find me in iniquity. In no iniquity. That is sin.

But I am the Lord your God. Ever since the land of Egypt, I will make you dwell in tents. As in the days of the appointed feast, I have also spoken by the prophets and have multiplied visions.

I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets. Though Gilead has idols, surely they are vanity. Though they sacrifice bulls and Gilgal, indeed their altars shall be heaps in the furrows of the field.

Did you see that? The statement of Israel there in the beginning of that little section? Surely I have become rich. We remind ourselves that Hosea prophesied during a time of great prosperity, but it was also a time of spiritual and moral decadence in Israel. You know, when things are good financially, it's hard for people to believe that society is in trouble.

What do you mean society is in trouble? I just bought a new car. I just got a new TV. I just got a new boat.

How can anything be wrong? Everything is great. That's what Israel said. They said in all my labors, they shall find in me no iniquity.

That is sin. But what does God say? He says, I'm going to bring you low. He said, I'm going to make you dwell in tents again.

Oh yeah, they lived in financial prosperity. They lived in fine homes. And God says, I'm going to bring you into humble exile, and you're going to live in tents again.

The judgment is certain because God spoke by the prophets, yet they didn't listen. The reproach will return upon Ephraim. Look at it here, verse 12.

Jacob fled to the country of Syria. Israel served for a spouse, and for a wife he tended sheep. By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved.

Ephraim provoked him to anger most bitterly. Therefore the Lord will leave on him his blood guilt and return his reproach upon him. Interestingly enough, God brought in in the previous verses the idea of Israel's exile and how they'd be living in tents.

And that would be God's judgment against them. Now in verse 12, he looks back to Jacob in the book of Genesis again. And if you remember, when Jacob had to flee to the country of Syria, and there he served his uncle Laban for the privilege of marrying Rachel.

Laban pulled the old switcheroo on him. And he ended up having him serving twice as long for Leah and Rachel. And it says there in verse 12, for a wife he tended sheep.

Well here it's drawn parallel. Just as Jacob was exiled to Israel, so now you will be exiled. Just as much as Jacob's sin, the sin of deceiving his father, brought exile upon himself, so Israel will be sent away in exile.

But God sent Jacob prophets. Verse 13, by a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved. God sent prophets to Israel, but they still rejected his word.

It says there in verse 14, they provoked him to anger most bitterly, so God will leave them in their guilt, and return the reproach of Egypt's slavery upon them. God has sent you his word. It's precious, isn't it? You have it there, perhaps an open Bible on your lap, and you enjoy it, you read it, and we come here tonight, and we go through it, and it's wonderful.

But you realize the great, great price there is to pay for neglecting or rejecting God's word. It says right there, verse 14, therefore the Lord will leave on him his blood guilt. I'll just leave the guilt on him.

Oh, what a terrible thing it is to reject the word of the Lord. Now friends, you can reject the word of the Lord in a couple different ways. You can start ripping pages out of your Bible, tearing them up, and throwing them into the fire, but there's another way.

You know that you can reject the word of the Lord through your neglect. I heard a story once about a young man who went off to a Bible school, actually a seminary, and his father was very, very nervous about the young man going off to seminary, because he knew that it was somewhat of a liberal seminary, and he thought, well, my son might have his faith undermined in the word of God. And so he said, Son, you know, this is my Bible, and I want you to read it, and to trust in it, and to know that this word is true when you go off to school.

And the son said, Father, let me have a half hour alone with your Bible. And so he goes, and he went to another room, and a half hour later, he gave his father's back to him, and said, Father, I'll see you at the end of the school year. So when he came back after the end of the school year, he started telling his father, oh, how he didn't believe in the Bible anymore.

His father, that whole story of Jonah, it's all just a fable. None of it ever happened. The big fish, all of that, it's just a big fable.

It's like Aesop's fable. It's not true. His father was appalled, absolutely appalled.

His father said, I can't believe it, son. By this whole year, you know, you've gone, and you've learned this, what the seminary has taught you, that it's no good, that the Bible's not true. How can it be? His father said, the book of Jonah is a big fable.

Look for yourself. The father said, well, I'll show you. And he opened up his Bible and he searched for the book of Jonah.

He couldn't find it. Well, it's not that he couldn't find it because it's hard to find, although the book of Jonah is small. It takes you a little while.

But he looked and he looked and he looked and he couldn't find it. It was nowhere. And he saw that the pages of the book of Jonah were gone from his Bible.

The son withdrew from his back pocket some torn pages from his father's Bible. He said, well, here it is, father. I've had it all this year.

And you haven't noticed it's gone until now. He said, what's the difference if I take out the book of Jonah from not believing it, or if you take it out from neglecting it? It's the same difference, isn't it? The book of Jonah is gone. The father never even missed it.

So, friends, God has sent us his prophets. We have the testimony of the apostles and prophets and his glorious word in front of us. We need to ask the spirit of God to do his work through the word of God so that we would never have blood guilt upon us.

Let's pray together. Father, that's our prayer tonight. You give us great privilege in your word, Lord, and we're thankful for it.

But we never want to presume upon that, Lord. Instead, with full gratitude of heart, we thank you for your word. And we ask, Lord God, for an outpouring of your spirit upon us.

Lord, when we look to your word and trust in your word, Father, we're not doing it in a way that exalts academics, that exalts our mind above our spirit. No, Lord, we're saying we want the spirit of God to work in and through the word of God in our lives. We bow our hearts before you.

And as the rain falls to the ground outside this building, we want the rain of your Holy Spirit to fall upon us, to draw us deeper and deeper into your word. Break up the fallow ground in our hearts that your word may be sown in righteousness in us. We pray this tonight in Jesus' name.

Amen. Praise God. All right.

Well, tonight was a little tough because I didn't know if we would finish up the book of Hosea or not. And the answer is not. Next week we will, the last two chapters.

And I feel a little cheated because the last two chapters are so good. I was itchy to get to them tonight, but I didn't want to rush them. So that'll be for next week.

Remember upcoming events. Nils Bergstrom has his fasting seminar this coming Saturday. Lots of other things going on.

Take a look at what's happening. And Lord bless you tonight. Amen.

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