

It's Time to Seek the Lord!

by Ronald Glass

The sermon emphasizes the urgency of seeking the Lord and the importance of preparation for revival, highlighting the role of God's word in cultivating righteousness and the law of sowing and reaping.

Duration: 1:00:57

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Hosea 10:12, Hosea 14:1-2, Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:2, Galatians 6:9, James 4:8

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the state of society and the impact of sin. He refers to a passage in the Bible that describes a society that has broken its relationship with God and is engulfed in chaos and corruption. The speaker emphasizes that sin not only affects individuals but also has an environmental impact. He then highlights the importance of confession of sin and the need for revival, citing the example of the Welsh revival. The sermon concludes by pointing out the current challenges faced by the world, such as economic chaos and political tensions.

Transcript

I'm continuing today in our series of studies in the subject of biblical revival, and I want to point you to one verse in the book of Hosea, the Minor Prophet Hosea, the tenth chapter of Hosea, and verse twelve. Hosea chapter ten, verse twelve, and this is what it says, sow with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, until he comes to rain righteousness on you. Growing up in the fertile corn belt of northern Illinois, I well remember some spring planting, acres of freshly plowed rich topsoil as far as the eye could see, punctuated only by barns and silos and farmhouses.

I remember so clearly because many of the kids that I went to school with in those early elementary school days stayed home during those weeks to help out on the farm to get the crops in. Now within weeks, those fields were carefully fertilized and, if necessary, irrigated. In fact, if you drove through the countryside in those days, those days there was no automobile air conditioning, so you opened the windows and as you drove through the countryside, you smelled the fertilizer.

And it wasn't the most pleasant smell, but it was a smell that you knew that crops had been planted and they were growing. Now the production of a good crop required the careful preparation of the land, and this is the imagery that the prophet Hosea, living as he did in an agricultural society, he uses this to communicate God's message to the disobedient people that were there in Israel. Hosea lived and served

the Lord in the last half of the 8th century B.C. He had a very long ministry, but his book is rather short.

He was an older contemporary of Micah and Isaiah. Those two men prophesied primarily to the southern kingdom of Judah. But Hosea, by the way his name is just another form of the name Joshua, Hosea was sent by God primarily to the rapidly decaying culture of the northern kingdom of Israel.

His prophetic activity took place during a time when Israel was having a series of very short reigns. On the part of kings, they were all godless, evil men. They were coming and going rapidly.

In fact, during the latter years of Hosea's life, Israel went away into exile, deported into exile by the Assyrian armies. Hosea, I think, is the foremost prophet of revival in the Old Testament. God used Hosea in a very remarkable way.

It is not unusual for God to take his prophets and make them object lessons to the people to whom he had sent them. Hosea was no exception in this. The first three chapters of Hosea's book are something of an introduction, but what an introduction.

It is a historical introduction focusing on Hosea's personal life, his family. Hosea is told by God to go and marry a prostitute. Now that doesn't sound like what God would ask someone to do, but he did.

From this marriage of Hosea and this woman named Gomer, who was a prostitute, there were three children. Each one of those children had names. Each one of those names had significance.

The first was a son named Jezreel. God was pointing to the place where one day he would judge the nation in the valley of Jezreel. Then there was another, and his name was Ami, or Lo-Ami, which means not my people.

God's declaration saying you are not my people any longer. But then there was also the sister, the third child, whose name was Ruamah, and she was named Mercy. And in that compassion, and that expresses really the nature of the conflict, the spiritual conflict, and God's role in it.

A sinful people who would be judged, a people that God would say you are not my people. I am setting you aside because of your disobedience. And then the God who revives, who says I will one day have compassion on you and bring you back to myself.

Now in our last study, we heard David's heartfelt plea for revival in Psalm 119 verse 26, in which David said those verses, give me understanding that I may know your testimonies, that I may know your word. And then he said this, it is time for the Lord to act. I think there is something of a dialogue that God carries on because in our text, we essentially have the answer to David's plea, it is time for you to act.

Because the Lord says in this verse, it is time for you to seek the Lord. Now here are two sides of the very important thinking of scripture with regard to revival. It is probably the heart's desire of a majority of evangelical Christians today who would echo amen's to the prayer, Lord it is time for you to work.

But there is a strange silence from God's people when God comes back and says, now it is time for you to seek the Lord. As we think of the urgent need of spiritual awakening that faces our generation today, we need to realize that we have a responsibility. If you read the history of the revivals, as well as the biblical history, you realize very quickly that revival has both a divine and a human component.

We must seek the Lord. Revival is a sovereign work of God, but it entails God's people coming to a point where they seek the Lord. Well now let me ask the question, what was Hosea's world like? The simple answer is, a lot like ours.

Look around and what do you see? Well that is what Hosea saw, spiritual bankruptcy that led to open sin. Let me give you a taste of it. Look for a moment in the fourth chapter.

Listen to the first verses in the fourth chapter. Listen to the word of the Lord, O sons of Israel. For the Lord has a case, that means a lawsuit.

God said, I am suing you, the inhabitants of the land. Why? Because there is no faithfulness, there is no truth, or kindness. We are going to meet that word again in our text.

That is that word I have been talking to you about. Covenant loyalty. That is covenant faithfulness.

Faithfulness to the obligations of a legally binding agreement. You have broken the covenant. You have broken the agreement.

That is legally in God's mind. That is a legally binding agreement. That is why God says, I am hauling you into court.

I have a suit against you. Nor is there any knowledge of God in the land. Instead, what is there? Verse 2, there is swearing, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery.

They employ violence so that the bloodshed follows bloodshed. Therefore, the land mourns, and everyone who lives in it languishes, along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky, and also the fish of the sea disappear. What do we see here? Verse 1 tells us that they broke their relationship, their agreement with God.

They were spiritually corrupt. Verse 2 tells us that society was dissolving in chaos, swearing, deception, murder, stealing, adultery, violence, bloodshed. It sounds like the headlines of our news reports here in America today.

And then verse 3 says something very interesting. The very physical world was impacted. The land mourns, the beasts of the field, the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea.

Let me put it in simple terms. There is an environmental impact to sin. That's where our environmentalists don't get it.

The problem with environmentalism is not passing more laws or having more agencies, cap and trade, and taxes, and all of that garbage. The answer is righteousness. Now, there was political and legal chaos.

Come back to chapter 10 for a moment and look in verse 3 of chapter 10. Here's what they're saying. Surely now they will say, we have no king.

We do not revere the Lord. As for the king, what can he do for us? They speak mere words. With worthless oaths they make covenants.

Now he's saying there is no respect for authority. They didn't care about the king. They said, we have no king.

Well, they had a king, but he was as good as nothing. As I said, the kings were coming and going rather quickly, and they were all worthless men. For we do not revere the Lord.

There's the problem. They didn't revere the king because, first of all, they didn't revere the Lord. What can a king do for us? What good is the government to us? So there was chaos.

And then they speak mere words, worthless oaths they make covenants. Their contracts were worthless. They're making covenants.

They're making contracts with each other and breaking them at will. So political and legal chaos as well. Now, here's the indictment against the spiritual leaders, chapter 4 again, and verses 6 through 9. Now we're talking about the priests.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. And that's just not head knowledge. That is a personal relationship with God.

Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being my priests. Now see, he's talking here to the spiritual leaders, the priests. Since you, priests, whose responsibility as we saw in our last study is to teach the law to the people.

Since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children. The more they multiply, the more they sinned against me. I will change their glory into shame.

They feed on the sin of my people. They direct their desire toward their iniquity. The priests are living just like the rest of the sinners.

And it will be like people, like priests. So I will punish them for their ways. I will repay them for their deeds.

It's a society which is very sad. We look at our nation today and we see the very sad state of the ministry in this nation. If you read the little inserts we put in your bulletins every couple of weeks, what's going on in the world, very often you will see those very kinds of things, keeping you up to date on the corruption that's going on within our churches.

The future is bleak. What is the nation's confidence? Back to chapter 10. Look at verse 13.

You have plowed wickedness. You have reaped injustice. You have eaten the fruit of lies.

You're living godless lives, wicked, sinful lives, unjust. There's no justice. You've eaten the fruit of lies.

Why? Because you've trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors. They were putting their faith in their military strength. Thought that would save them.

This is why Hosea calls the nation to repentance. I want you to notice in verse 12, the key word. We find it in the first line and we find it in the last line.

And the word is righteousness. What is righteousness? It is the result of repentance. Righteousness means doing the right thing in the eyes of God.

And it comes from repentance. Now what Hosea does here, very graphically for his agricultural society, is to picture this in terms of the harvest. And I want you to think very carefully with me about this in the three following steps that are involved in bringing in the harvest.

Only we're thinking here not of a literal crop of corn or wheat. We're thinking in terms of spiritual righteousness. Let me begin.

First of all, step number one. The laborer will be preoccupied with the harvest. Do you notice that? So with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness.

Every spring the farmer has only one thing on his mind. And that is he has to get his crops in. Nothing else matters.

Like I said earlier, sometimes the kids would even stay home from school. Why? Because the family was so focused. We had a short window in which to get the crops in.

From the time the snow melts and the ground thaws, before the summer heat comes, we have a short window in which to get those crops planted. And that planting becomes the farmer's only priority. Now I think Hosea is telling us, telling his people and us as well, that we who seek revival have to have that same mindset.

The winter snows have melted. The snow has thawed. We have a short period of time before God deals with us in judgment.

And therefore, revival must be our passion. Now if that's the case, what are we going to do? Two things. First of all, our seed must be planted intentionally.

So with a view to righteousness, there is first the planting. Now let me say something very obvious. Crops are produced only from seeds.

You have to plant seeds to get the crops. They would take the planters. I forget the exact name of the implement now.

I used to know all this stuff. And they would spread the seed after they had plowed the field into the furrows. In would go the seed and turn the soil over on top of the little seed corn in order to plant the crop.

And that is what Hosea is saying here. Thus Israel is exhorted to plant with a view to. Let me give you the force of those words, with a view to.

It means for the purpose of righteousness. Sow or plant for the purpose of righteousness. Now again, righteousness is holiness.

It is obedience. It is doing the right thing. Doing the thing that God has commanded.

Now what is the seed? Well, when you look at biblical imagery, you find out that the seed is usually God's word. Now Jesus said that. Remember in Matthew chapter 13 when he told the parable there of the sower and the seed and the soils? In Matthew chapter 13 verse 3 when he said the sower went out to sow and he sowed and some seeds fell beside the road and the birds came and ate them up and so on.

Now in verse 19 he explains and he says, when anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand, the evil one comes and snatches it away. So what Jesus was talking about was the word of God. Now that is confirmed for us also by Peter.

In 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 23 where Peter says you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable. That is through the living and enduring word of God. So what is Hosea saying here? He is saying that the just as the farmer plows the field and plants the seed in order to produce a crop, we as God's sinful people need to plant the seed of God's word in order to produce a crop of righteousness.

So here is what he is saying. There must be a conscious use of God's word for the purpose of cultivating righteousness. Godliness does not just happen.

It will not just all of a sudden overtake you one day while you are sitting in your lounging chair or driving in your car or sitting at your desk at work. God does not just all of a sudden come and say presto you are righteous. It does not work that way when you plant a crop.

It does not work that way with righteousness. You have to plant the seed. That is the role God's word plays in our lives.

I heard a story years ago about the famous missionary to Africa C.T. Studd. I forget whether it was another missionary or perhaps a Christian leader from America but this person was visiting C.T. Studd. They had good fellowship one night and they said good night to each other and went to bed.

At four o'clock in the morning the guest woke up and in that little hut they were in, little dwelling there in the middle of the jungles of Africa. The guest saw C.T. Studd, great missionary, seated at his desk with a candle or a kerosene lamp and he said to him, what are you doing at four o'clock in the morning? C.T. Studd who had in front of him an open Bible said, I am just going through the word of God to see if there are any commands I have overlooked. This godly man was so focused, so intent that he would not let one single command from God go unobeyed in his life.

That's the attitude. That's the attitude. Our seed must be planted intentionally.

The other thing I want you to see here is that our seed will produce abundantly. Reap in accordance with again for the purpose of, now the word is kindness. Let me again remind you this is the word covenant faithfulness.

So he is saying reap or harvest for the purpose of covenant faithfulness, of being faithful to the covenant obligations that you have as the people of God. The fruit of righteousness is for the sake of obedience to the requirements that God has set forth in his covenant. Now when we bring this to the level of the church today, what we are saying is that we must saturate ourselves with God's word in order to bring our lives into complete obedience to God.

That is the intentional commitment that we must make. The well known revivalist of the 19th century, and I don't agree with a lot of what he did, but he did have some very important observations, Charles G. Finney. He said, revival is, and I quote, nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God.

Do you hear that? Revival is nothing else than a new beginning of obedience to God. And there is no reaping righteousness without sowing righteousness. Again, it doesn't just happen.

Now this happens to be something that scripture talks about on a number of occasions. Eliphaz in the book of Job chapter 4 verse 8, according to what I have seen, those who plow iniquity and those who sow trouble harvest it. You sow the seed of sin in your life, you are going to reap sin in your life.

You say, I want to live the way I want to live. Fine. Then when your life falls apart and your family falls apart and your job falls apart and everything else falls apart, don't blame God.

You are just reaping what you sow. Proverbs, the 11th chapter, verse 18, the wicked earns deceptive wages but he who sows righteousness gets a true reward. There is the other side of the coin.

You sow righteousness, you are rewarded for it. Proverbs chapter 22 and the 8th verse, he who sows iniquity will reap vanity. He who sows iniquity will reap nothingness, emptiness.

Now it's also a New Testament principle. Let me remind you of what Paul says in Galatians chapter 6 verses 7 and 8, do not be deceived, God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he also will reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh, from the flesh reaps corruption, the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

God has a law of sowing and reaping and it always works. And just as it does in the physical world, in the agricultural world, so it does in the spiritual world as well. We have this truth on God's authority.

This is not something to go home and debate to see whether you really believe it or not. You have to just take it, accept it, believe it, God said it, that's the way it works. The laborer will be preoccupied with the harvest.

Now let me come to the second step in this harvest and actually we have to back up. The second step is that the land must be prepared for the harvest. The land must be prepared for the harvest.

You see before the planting there must come the preparation. The preparation for revival as for the farmer involves two critical elements. You see it's not just so simple as saying I'm going to take a bag of seed and throw it on the ground.

In fact it's not even so simple as saying in a modern farmer's sense I'm going to load up my spreader with seed and I'm going to take it out there in the plowed field. Well that's good when you get to that point but how did you get to that point? Two critical elements. Number one, we must admit the severity of the obstructions.

Here's the word, break up your fallow ground. Break up your fallow ground. Now what is fallow ground? The word here in the text as Hosea wrote it refers to virgin soil.

Now this is much different than cultivated farm land. The farmer plants his field and then his crop grows. He harvests it in the fall.

It lies dormant during the winter. He comes back the next spring. He drives his plow into the field, turns over the soil and prepares it for the next year's crop.

That's pretty easy. Well what about the farmer who says I've got 100 acres back there that's wooded and I want to turn that into farm land, productive arable cultivated farm land. Now what's he got to do? He's got to go back there into those woods.

He's got to cut the trees down. He's got to pull the stumps out of the ground and the gnarled roots out of the ground. He's got to get the stones out of the soil.

That's hard work. That's what Hosea is talking about here. And they didn't have backhoes and trucks and bulldozers and things like that in those days.

It was all done by hand with a little help from the mules. Now if the seed is God's word, what is fallow ground in Hosea's analogy? Fallow ground is a life of sin. You can't just throw seed on fallow ground.

It won't grow. A person hardened in their sins, an unbeliever, unconverted and unconcerned, a Christian living out of the will of God is fallow ground. They can hear the preaching of the word, the testimony of the truth.

They can read the pages of the word. It just lays there. Nothing happens.

Righteousness cannot flourish in a sin saturated life. Hosea's message got through because many, many years later, one of the great prophets to Judah quoted Hosea, Jeremiah. In the fourth chapter of Jeremiah, listen to these words.

God pleading now with the southern kingdom to get their act together. If you will return, O Israel, declares the Lord, then you should return to me. And if you will put away from your detested things from my presence and will not waver and you will swear as the Lord lives in truth, in justice, in righteousness, then the nations will bless themselves in him, in God.

And in him, in God, they will glory. For thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, break up your fallow ground and do not sow among thorns. So you got to pull the weeds out and all of the underbrush and all of that stuff, all of that has to come out.

Then he changes the imagery. Circumcise yourself to the Lord and remove the foreskins of your heart, men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem or else my wrath will go forth like fire and burn with an unquenched because of what? Because of your evil deeds. Now there's no question this is very hard work.

It's not only hard for the farmer, it's hard for the Christian. Now when it comes to revival, we all want the blessings, but we don't want to be broken. We don't want our lives to be disturbed.

Come on, pastor, preach at us while we're here. But as soon as I walk out that door, I want to live the way I want to live. I don't want anything said in this building to have to impact the way I live when I get outside.

We're content with our sins, but I can tell you on the authority of the word of God and with the testimony of 2,000 years of church history that revival comes only when there is brokenness over sin. The southern evangelist Vance Havner said, I quote, the same church members who yell like Comanche Indians at a ball game on Saturday sit like wooden Indians in a church on Sunday. Charles Finney again said, there can be no revival when Mr. Amen and Mr. Wet Eyes are not found in the audience.

And what he's saying there is, unless there's some brokenness, some crushing over sin, unless God comes in and bends us, the great prayer of the Welsh revival, Lord, bend us. And they meant it. And he did.

What are we facing at this moment in our world? Well, if you pay any attention to the news, I don't really need to tell you. All you have to do is look at this last week. We have economic chaos in America.

We have our president in Egypt saying some things that are astounding. We have a world that is rapidly corrupting and collapsing. We have Iran and North Korea with nuclear weapons and developing missiles to deliver them, and nobody knows what to do about it.

We have the nations of the world increasingly abandoning and conspiring against Israel. You look at evangelicalism, and we see a very difficult picture. The vast majority of evangelical churches today have their hearts set on entertaining the people, because when you deliberately entertain, you'll fill the place, and you'll build bigger sanctuaries.

The music, the dancing, and the video, and all of the programs, coffee shops, and the foyers, all of that draws people. People are entertained. People go out feeling good, but they go out to fallow ground.

We look at our own community here. Again, this is just this week, folks. This is this week's community journal here in Wading River.

For those of you who aren't from Wading River in the area, you probably don't read it. But if you know anything about the community journal, you know that they carry on an intense battle every year with the school board over irresponsible spending. Here's what was the lead article on the front page.

There were many negative comments hurled at the community journal. Most slurs were cloaked with just a couple of them were in the open. One of the reporters said, they're in fear of retribution for disagreeing with the district and the board.

The reporter said, personally, I've had my mailbox busted three times. The community journal is an example of retribution. It's alive and well in Shoreham Wading River.

The paper's been met with hate mail, malicious phone calls, inaccurate accusations, and it says later on, it is not the American way to incite others to hate, to insult, to willfully destroy or remove property, threaten businesses or other people's happiness, because there's a different point of view. No, it's not the American way, but it's the Wading River way. One of my great griefs of heart is that we, as a congregation, have been 27 years in this community and we still haven't made any progress in breaking up the fallow ground.

This community hates each other. Sometimes we even see that hatred coming into the church. Ladies and gentlemen, we must admit to ourselves the severity of the obstructions.

It's tough fallow ground out there. Let me say secondly here, we must also admit the urgency of the time. Notice what he says, for it is time to seek the Lord.

The season will not wait. The farmer knows during the very short planting season that every day delayed is a day lost. He can sit and read his newspaper and watch Oprah if he wants and sip coffee on the front porch.

Nobody's going to force him to go out in the field, but every day he does that during planting season, he's lost a day and he can't get that day back. Our responsibility is to act and our responsibility is to act now. I go back to this passage that I constantly quote and I'll continue to constantly quote.

Isaiah 55, 6 and 7, seek the Lord while he may be found. Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return to the Lord and he will have

compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

God says if you'll just seek me, I'll come and I'll forgive you. I'll pardon your sins. Let me come to a New Testament statement of the same thing, Paul in Colossians 3. Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on the earth. Did you hear that? Where's your mind today? Set on the things on earth or are you thinking about heavenly things? So we see that the laborer will be preoccupied with the harvest. The land must be prepared for the harvest and then in the third place, the Lord will be providing the harvest.

It's a biblical principle that God gives the growth. We see that in 1 Corinthians 3 where Paul had to deal with all the dissension going on in that church surrounding loyalty to human leaders and Paul had to say this, I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything but God who causes the growth.

Where does the crop come from? It comes from God. You see, the farmer does what he can do which is to prepare the land and then to put the seed in the ground, but the farmer has to stop at that point. Oh, he can water if it gets dry or he can put a little fertilizer on it, but no farmer would ever go out there into his field and get down on his knees and dig around in the dirt and say, okay, now seed, now it's time.

Come on, come on. Try to crack open the seed and get the plant to grow. No.

God has built in the process by which a seed grows. God gives the increase. If God withholds the rain, the increase isn't so great.

If God sends a great storm and tears up the field, then the increase is lost. God is in control. I want you to notice two principles here.

First of all, the preparation for revival requires patience. It is time to seek the Lord. Now notice the next word, until.

Until. We have to wait. You see, the whole process of revival is not like we so often see today in our culture.

It's not a machine where you push a button and get an instant result. We complain when our computers are so slow that it takes half a second instead of a tenth of a second for it to respond. We want God to work that same way in our lives.

God doesn't do that. James chapter 5, verse 7, therefore be patient brethren until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious produce of the soil, being patient about it until it gets the early and the late rains.

You too be patient. Strengthen your hearts. The coming of the Lord is near.

That certainly is true with the physical return of the Lord Jesus, but also I believe it could well be for the return of the Lord to his church and power. I read to you Galatians 6, 7 and 8 a while ago. Listen to verse 9. Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary.

Keep on, pressing on. The preparation for revival requires patience and then the promise of revival yields righteousness. Until he comes to rain righteousness on you.

You see rain was a very vivid symbol to the farmers in the arid regions of Palestine. The early rains of winter, the latter rains of spring were a blessing without which there were no crops. The summertime in that part of the world is brutal.

The heat is enormous. It doesn't rain. The ground parches and cracks.

So they take advantage of the early rains of winter, the latter rains of spring to get their crops. It was a lack of rain which tempted the Israelites to adopt pagan fertility cults. All around them lived these Canaanites, these people who worshipped the Baals, those pagan gods that were essentially fertility deities.

They worshipped them because they believed they could give crops. That's what the pagans believed and the Israelites began to adopt it, especially when they saw God abandoning them, then they would go to the pagan gods. But I want you to listen to the promise of God to his people.

They would just get their lives right with him. Isaiah chapter 44 verse 3, wonderful verse, I will pour out water on the thirsty land and streams upon the dry ground. And I will pour my spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.

And they will spring up among the grass like poplars by streams of water. I praise God today for men in this nation 200, 300 years ago who believed this, who sought God and revival came with power. And you and I, their descendants, are still reaping the blessings of those revivals.

But the question is, what about our grandchildren and great-grandchildren? Isaiah 45 verse 8, drip down, O heavens, from above. Let the clouds pour down righteousness. Let the earth open up and salvation bear fruit and righteousness spring up with it.

I, the Lord, have created it. Now it's interesting that the word reign here in our text could also mean teach, the same word can mean teach. True revival is the Holy Spirit's work of teaching God's people the way of righteousness by illuminating their minds to their obligation for obedience to God's word.

And then by convicting them of their failure to obey it, to observe it. Wonderful words by John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace. He said it this way, Savior, visit thy plantation.

Grant us, Lord, a gracious reign. All will come to desolation unless thou return again. Keep no longer at a distance.

Shine upon us from on high. Lest for want of thine assistance, every plant should droop. For an agricultural nation like ancient Israel, so this passage delivered a clear and unmistakable message.

This was not a verse to teach about farming, it was a verse calling the nation to repent. And I don't think this verse is any mystery to 21st century Christians either. What did the Lord tell Israel to do about it? How could this revival of righteousness begin? Well, we're not left in the dark.

I want you to come for a moment, just turn a page or so, 14th chapter of Hosea. Here's the invitation. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him, take away all iniquity and receive us graciously that we may present the fruit of our lips. In other words, that our worship might be acceptable to you.

Take words. You often hear us say, well, words don't matter. It's deeds that matter.

But God says here, words matter. God wants us to bring our words. And our words are these.

This is the summary. Take away all iniquity. Forgive our sins and receive us graciously.

The history of revival proves that the very heart of revival, and the place where it really begins, is confession of sin. And I want you to think about this we must break up the fallow ground. We must plant the seed.

We must patiently await the mature crop. Now that's not hard for us to understand, is it? It's just hard to do. But I want to ask you to do that today.

Now, I realize that just like the preparation of a fallow piece of ground is not something that can be done in a day. It takes time to prepare a rocky stump field for cultivation. And it's the same with our lives of sin.

It may take you time to break up the fallow ground in your life. But we, all of us, we need to begin. Or there will be no revival in our church.

There will be no revival, no awakening, no change in our community. Now if we do, if we do take words and come to God and say take away all our iniquity, here's the promise of God, chapter 14, look in verse 4. I will heal their apostasy. I will love them freely.

For my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily.

He will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. His shoots will sprout and his beauty will be like the olive tree and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon. Those who live in his shadow will again raise grain and they will blossom like the vine.

His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon. What do you want us to do, Pastor? You've told us all of this. What do you want us to do? What are we supposed to do? Alright, I'm going to tell you about one thing I did.

I just want to share this with you. A little bit of a confession, I guess. Several weeks ago I became convicted that I was addicted to talk radio.

My wife got on my case about it. Every time I got in the car, I hit the radio button to talk radio. Every time I came home for lunch, first thing I did was turn on talk radio.

Come home for dinner, see which next talk radio host is on and I listened to that one. Get ready for bed at night, hit the radio again, talk radio. I have to admit it was the same thing over and over again.

My wife could see it but I couldn't. It was affecting me. Then I got to thinking about it one day.

I find myself angry a lot. I find myself tense. I find myself with certain fears being generated in my heart.

I find myself with bad attitudes. One of the things it was doing was taking away time that could have been spent in reading, in prayer, talking to the family, or just in quiet, or listening to good music. But there was

something else about that.

Virtually every one of those talk radio hosts is profane language. The kind of language that I would not permit in my home, that I would not allow my children to use in the home, I was allowing these profane men to bring into my home. God started speaking to me about this and saying, how can I bless you when my name is being taken in vain in your house? How can I bless you with revival for your ministry when you're listening to this stuff? Worldly perspective.

God is not in this. Then the nail in the coffin was when one of my brothers here in this church started telling me how excited he was. He was listening to revival sermons on the internet.

God said, look at this. Men in your church are listening to sermons on revival, and you're listening to these foul-mouthed talk radio hosts. So a couple of weeks ago, I said, Lord, that's it.

I'm done. No more talk radio in our home. I followed the lead of my good brother.

I got out the computer, and I started listening to sermons. I feel more at peace. There's more quiet.

Sometimes I listen to decent music. I still listen to some news broadcasts here and there for a few minutes to find out what's going on in the world, but I don't need all of the ranting and raving. As much as I might agree politically, it was damaging me spiritually.

So I have given it up. I have said, Lord, it's sin. It's not helping me.

It's hindering my life. It's hindering my family. It's hindering my ministry.

I put it aside. I do this, Lord, for me, yes, for my family, yes, but for you above everything else. There's a little fallow ground in my life that needed to be broken up, and God, I believe, has honored that, even though it's only been a few weeks.

Now here's what I want to do today. I'm going to ask all of you sitting here quietly to take from the pew in front of you one of those little sermon notes, pieces of paper. Just take a little piece of paper.

You'll find a pencil there, or maybe you have a pen in your pocket or whatever. Here's what I want you to do. You get that pencil, and you get that little sermon note piece of paper.

Put that in your lap, and I want you to bow your heads with me. Bow your heads with me, because I don't want you looking around. I'm going to stop for just a moment of quiet reflection, and now here's what I want you to do.

In the quietness, and I don't think this will take very long, I want you to identify a major sin in your life that's holding back the Lord's blessing. Just one. You can probably think of a lot more, but just one.

I want you to choose one. Any sin. Preferably the one that's most troublesome in your life, but any sin.

What is it that's holding you back from your fellowship with God? Is it you don't spend time in the Word? You don't pray? Is it the way you treat your wife or your husband? Is it your attitude towards your children or your parents? Are you cheating at work, or are you cheating at school? Have you been stealing? Have you been involved in pornography? All right, I want you to pick one of those sins, and I want you to write that sin on a slip of paper. Just write that sin down on a slip of paper. When you've finished writing it down,

I want you to tuck it away in your Bible, your purse, or your pocket, or somewhere where you will be sure to retrieve it later today.

I don't want you to share it with anyone. Unless you want to later on, but don't share it with anyone. I want you to covenant with God that beginning today, you are through with that sin.

I want you to pray for victory. I have a sneaking suspicion that you may find, as I think I am finding in my own life, that when I deal with one sin, there are some other sins that seem to go, too, that are easier to handle, that is easier to have victory over, or perhaps disappear. I'm simply asking you to take some decisive action to make a substantial, tangible change in your life, and to make that a reality.

I'm not asking you to go home and forget about it. I'm asking you to do something about it, so that as a congregation, we begin pulling out the stumps and the stones, and making our land fertile. Ladies and gentlemen, I want you to listen to Hosea's final words, the last verse in his book.

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things. Whoever is discerning, let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right, and the righteous will walk in them, but transgressors will stumble in them.

My dearly beloved brother or sister, don't stumble. Walk in righteousness, and now it's time to seek the Lord. Father, you read the hearts and the minds of everyone here.

You have seen the determination of brothers and sisters, even young people who have written that word on that piece of paper, and mean to do business with you about that sin, as soon as they leave here today. Oh God, give them the strength, the commitment to see it through. As we break up our fallow ground, as we begin to get rid of sin in our lives, in order that we may become channels for the blessing of revival, the wading river, the surrounding communities of Eastern Long Island.

We can't do it without your spirit. We commit ourselves humbly to his power today, in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm going to ask you in the same sort of spirit of quietness to sing our next hymn. The first three verses, I just want you to sing quietly while you're seated. And I want you to think about the words and about the decision that you've made today.

Men and women, I haven't explained this to you too much, but I want to tell you something. I am convinced that I cannot play the Holy Spirit in your lives. I don't ask you, as some preachers, very sincere preachers of revival even do, to ask you to stand up and to come forward and stand at the front as a public declaration.

That doesn't mean anything if you do it for the wrong reasons, if you do it because of pressure or because of everybody else's doing it. I'm not going to ask you to take any public stand on this. This is between you and God and no one else.

But I want you to sing the first three verses of this hymn quietly and prayerfully in light of what you're deciding today. On the last two verses, Kevin, I'll ask you to stand and then the men come and join me at the table for the Lord's table. Will you do that? Don't let this decision that you're making quickly leave your mind.

But as we sing these verses, may it be a way of just deepening your commitment to righteousness. Kevin?

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/19/SID19889.mp3>
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