

Hosea 5:1 – 6:6

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Introduction:

Tonight I want us to look at Hosea, one of the Old Testament prophets. The immediate question that comes to mind is, “What could someone writing so long ago have to say to us today?” I believe that as we start to look at the situation he was in and what he said into that situation, a surprising amount. So let us first look at the context he was writing in.

Context:

The year is 733 BC, 11 years before the destruction of Samaria in 722 BC. The place is the northern kingdom of Israel. After some years of prosperity, decline set in suddenly after the death of Jeroboam II in 753 BC. The people considered themselves good Jews, though their lifestyle was borrowed more from their Canaanite neighbours than the Old Testament. They sacrificed regularly to Yahweh, but also had various foreign gods and idols that they worshipped. The result was that every area of their lives were affected particularly as the Baals were viewed as the source of fertility and prosperity. And after all, the worship of them was easy. Righteous self-discipline and a high moral standard was not required, and any rate, who wants to be kill-joy. And it wasn't just the ordinary people. The kings, priests and merchants all lead the way. The problem was that things were getting worse, when for most people it seemed things should really be getting better. There was social lawlessness and injustice was on the rise. Burglary, highway robbery, murder, drunkenness and intrigue were the norm rather than the exception. Doesn't much of this sound remarkably like South Africa in the present day?

It is into this situation that the prophet Hosea speaks and he does not speak a word of encouragement. No, rather he brings a word of warning, a word of judgement. Needless to say, he was not popular, in fact many considered him slightly mad. After all, weren't they God's people and they still sacrificed to Yahweh? They were Jews but not too Jewish. None of this strict moral uprightness and holiness. That was for the unenlightened past, not the modern Israel.

Read: Hosea 5¹ - 6⁶

Explanation:

1. Judgement is for everyone (v.1 - 3)

The first thing we notice is that Hosea spoke the word of the Lord to all the people. Kings, priests, merchants and commoners. This judgement was for everyone, no matter their position. The religious leaders were not excluded, neither were those in authority. The common man, the priests and the royal household were all to hear the judgement of God. Our position does not free us from the word of God. In fact, our position often makes us even more responsible. Ezekiel was the watchman for Israel and God said that he would hold him accountable for the blood of anyone he was told to warn and didn't (Ezekiel 33). Ministers of the gospel walk in similar



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shoes. If your desire is to be someone in the church, tread lightly. God will demand an accounting from you on the day of judgement. Remember this if Kenny has to admonishing you.

Hosea says they have been as a snare at Mizpah, a net spread out on Tabor. Exactly what Hosea was referring to here we do not know, but the idea is clear. As the huntsman lays out the snare, the fowler the net, those who follow paths not of God are keen to see others follow it as well. The leaders are leading the way. Even the priests are leading the people astray. The result is they are slaughtering their own people. But God says he will discipline them.

He knows all about Israel, it is not hidden from him. Men think he does not see or does not care, there outward show of religiosity is still there, so why should God worry about them? But God sees the heart, he sees what they do in private. And God lays at their feet that there are hearts are not right, something we find so often in the Old Testament. They have turned to prostitution. God is their husband, they are his wife, but they are not content with God. Rather they run after other gods, they want to live their lives their way. And so God calls them what they are - prostitutes. Israel is indeed corrupt. But let us always remember, these were Jews who were proud of their Jewishness.

2. These are the “religious” people (v.4 - 7)

Then Hosea says a startling thing. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. A spirit of prostitution is their heart. Because they think they are Jews and therefore God’s people, they don’t realise that they too need to repent and turn to God. Following God is not easy, it requires self-discipline to remain holy and righteous. The Jews here would rather live as the pagans around them, but the price is they ignore God but still think of themselves as Jews. As Hosea says, they do not acknowledge God. They do not know him. They know of him, they even worship him, but they do not know him. Their lives are not governed by the first commandment - You shall love the Lord your God with your heart, and all your soul and all your mind and all your strength.

As a result they were arrogant. They thought God was for them, they could worship all the Baals with impunity and so they stumbled into sin. And Judah was not better. They also stumbled with them.

But note that they were a very religious people. They went with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord. They were generous to the Lord, or so they thought. But Gods says to them that they will not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them. This is frightening. Here are a people who think of themselves as good Jews. They follow all the required external forms, sacrifice etc. Yet God says that he has withdrawn himself from them. They are not faithful to him so as a result they give birth to illegitimate children. Children are remarkably perceptive, even if they cannot put it into words. If they live in a house where the parents claim to be Christians and yet live their lives like everyone else around them, the children see it and know something is not right. Often they will not reject the gospel as much as rather just worship openly what their parents were worshipping secretly. As a result God calls them illegitimate children. They are not children of God, despite their parents thoughts. They keep all the right holidays and festivals, but because they do not do it with a right heart, their festivals will devour them and their fields. Their festivals will not be a time of rejoicing but of mourning.



3. The ways of judgement (v.12, 14)

Israel and Judah knew that something was wrong, but they didn't see the connection. The Assyrians were coming closer with every year. As a result, often the trade routes were disrupted and as a result, prices increased. So they looked to the great king for help. But God is clear - he will not be able to help them. We look to all sorts of solutions to our problems, but do we look to the only true solution. Most times, no. Initially God's judgements often come like that of a moth or rust. Internally, things go wrong. The money doesn't go as far as it use to. The crime rate increases. The government seems unable to make good decisions. Then God will tire of being like a moth or rot and the flood of his wrath will be opened. Then he will come like a lion and tear them to pieces, he will carry them off and no one will be able to rescue them. Let us remember this actually happened. Eleven years later Assyria swept down on Samaria, killing men, women and children, taking many of them to slavery in Assyria. Babies were dashed to the ground and pregnant women were ripped open, as we are told in Hosea 13¹⁶. The Assyrians were cruel. God is not mocked. And we have to remember - these are God's people, not just any nation. Then God says he will go back to his place until they admit their guilt and in their misery earnestly seek his face. His people he has rejected until they learn their lesson.

4. The sureness of judgement (v. 8 - 15)

But the judgement is coming, know matter what the kings, priests and people think. It is sure. The day of reckoning is coming. The trumpet will sound in Gibeah, the horn in Ramah. On that day Israel will be laid waste. And God declares what is certain. Both Israel and Judah will suffer judgement. He says that Judah's leaders are like those who move boundary stones. They are also unjust and unfair. As a result, God's wrath will be poured out on them like a flood of water. Israel too will be oppressed and trampled on, since they insist of pursuing idols. God says that he will be like a moth of Israel and like rot to the people of Judah. Israel should have woken up to the fact that God has left them when the days of prosperity ended and crime and violence started so sore.

The gospel affects the individual, but if enough individuals are affected, it will have an affect of society. We see this very much out here. Lot's of people go to church, but lawlessness is on the increase. The only thing we can conclude from this is that God is not happy with his people and he is judging them. Though we seek the Lord, we will not find him, because we do not seek him aright.

5. The "repentance" of Israel (v.1 - 4)

The problem though was that Israel would occasionally have a period of repentance. They would realise that things were not going well and so would say to each other, "Come, let us turn to the Lord." They recognised for a while that it was God that had injured them and so they turned to him. They recognised that the restoration would not be instantaneous. It would take a while. The recognised that they needed to know the Lord and if they did they knew that God would rise on them as the sun does, or the rain. Something definite.

The problem was that it never lasted. Everyday life got in the way. God almost despairs of them.



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What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you Judah? Their love is like the morning mist, like the early dew. It is there for a short while and then vanishes. It is too much like hard work to follow the Lord. Righteousness and holiness do not make you popular. And so the people spoke with their lips, thought their hearts were right but in reality their hearts remained in prostitution.

6. The prophet speaks (v.5 - 6)

Therefore says the Lord, he will cut them in pieces with his prophets and he will kill them with the word of his mouth. His judgements will be like lightning to them. Clearly seen but will they take notice of it. The prophets spoke clearly about the moral state of the people and the people did not like it. They like to think they were alright. Maybe a little bit of repentance here and there would be fine, but nothing that would affect their lives too seriously. They were quite happy thank you very much. The prophets were a real nuisance. They spoke of things the people didn't want to hear. When they were bringing judgement down on the surrounding people, the people were happy to listen. But when they started getting closer to home, they were not popular. Mad, rabble-rousers, kill-joys, hypocrites. It was the same with Jesus.

You see the real problem was that God was not really interested in sacrifice and all the external rituals. He was interested in justice and mercy and in the true knowing of himself. All those messy things that we prefer to ignore. If I'm alright then leave me alone. But as James says Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. Mercy, justice and the acknowledgement of God. Things haven't really changed.

7. The great future

So you may ask what is the comfort in this sermon. Is it not just a sermon about judgement? No. The thing we have to remember is that God has promised them, like us, a great future. But they weren't interested. Let us turn now to Hosea 14.

Read Hosea 14¹⁻⁹.

As you can see there is hope. Israel returned from the captivity in Babylon no longer a people who worshipped idols.

8. The Christian church like Israel (The application)

I think as we have gone through what was happening in Israel, the parallels to South Africa are frightening. God is indeed judging us. The moth and the rust are good descriptions of the kind of corruption we see in South Africa. And not only South Africa. Europe, America, even New Zealand, we see the same thing happening. The moth and the rust. The question then remains "What will be our Assyria?"

But does God have to do the same to us, or will we turn before the judgement and earnestly seek his face, loving him with all our heart, and all our soul, and all our heart and all our strength. But you say, we live in the era of the New Testament, not the Old. Things were different then. And



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this is something we need to understand. Today, far too much, Christians believe that they can, like the Israelites, live as they please, that righteous self-discipline and high moral standards are not really required. Rather they are only the icing on top, if you really want to be that committed. But this is a grave mistake and the church is paying the price. Someone once said of North American Christianity that it is about 3000 miles wide and half an inch deep. But the glaring question we need to ask is, are we any better. And it is not everyone else who must change. It is we ourselves. The only person in the world you have the power to change is yourself. Are you prepared to follow God and walk the path that he wishes you to walk. And think not that this is not a New Testament doctrine as well. Hosea gave the same message to Israel as John gave to the church at Laodicea. Let us read that passage together.

Read Revelation 3¹⁴⁻²².

Remember this was written to those who were or claimed to be Christians. Jesus stands at the door and knocks. Will we as Christians open the door and let him in, that we may sit with him in the throne room of God? Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4¹⁷ that judgement begins with the house of God and if it starts with us, how will those outside of Christ stand? But we have the advantage that if we truly repent of our sins and follow Christ whole-heartedly, we will sit with Jesus on the throne in heaven. Do not your hearts long to be with Christ? To know Christ better? Throw off you laziness and strive to know Christ better.

9. What do you really want?

There is a hymn in the Hymns of Faith book (No. 373) which was written by Love Maria Willis. She was born in 1824 and died in 1908. And this is the hymn she wrote:

Father, hear the prayer we offer!
Not for ease that prayer shall be,
But for strength that we may ever
Live our lives courageously.

Not for ever in green pastures
Do we ask our way to be:
But by steep and rugged pathways
Would we strive to climb to Thee.

Not for ever by still waters
Would we idly, quietly stay:
But would smite the living fountains
From the rocks along the way.

Be our strength in hours of weakness,
In our wanderings be our Guide;
Through endeavour, failure, danger,
Father, be Thou at our side.

Let our path be bright or dreary,



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Storm or sunshine be our share;
May our souls, in hope unwearied,
Make Thy work our ceaseless prayer.

Conclusion:



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