

HOSEA 5:15-6:6

RETURN TO THE LORD

In the time of the prophet Hosea the people didn't want to hear from God. They had turned to other gods. Their days are not much different than our days. So, when we hear God speak from back then we can know that God is still speaking to us now. The question for us is if we'll listen any better than Israel and Judah did. It had gotten so bad that God announced that He was withdrawing from His people.

People ask these days where God is and why He isn't doing something about all the bad we see in this world from wars to sickness and death. Where is God? What did God say would cause Him to come back? God said that He would retreat until His people acknowledged their guilt, until distress caused them to seek Him.

In this month of pride over sin people aren't acknowledging their guilt, but instead they're celebrating it. Most people these days aren't acknowledging their guilt, nor are they seeking God. It's not just out there in the world distant from us, but this celebration of sin and rejection of God's Word has crept into the Christian Church as well. We don't have to look at this pride month and their assault on the Christian faith, but we have to look at ourselves.

Christians today can be divided into two groups. One says that the Bible is the Word of God, and the other says that the Bible contains the word of God. To say that the Bible is the Word of God is to say that you believe all of it was inspired by God. All of it is true and we should be following all of it.

To say that the Bible contains the word of God is to say that parts of it were not inspired by God, and you don't have to believe those parts, or follow those parts. But how do you know which parts are the Word of God, and which are not? The moment you choose which parts to believe in and which parts not to believe you've made yourself to be your god. Your salvation now rests upon you, and thus in essence you lose all assurance of salvation.

Yet, no one wants to let their thoughts go that far. They only want to celebrate the freedom to choose what to believe, and they show anger and intolerance towards those who tell them what they do have to believe from the Bible. This isn't a recent phenomenon. Watch the old T.V. shows and you'll see this rejection of God and the picking and choosing of what people want to believe all over the place.

In a show from the 1970's that I recently watched a twenty something year old daughter yells angrily at her father that she doesn't have to believe everything that's in the Bible to be a Christian. She definitely wasn't acknowledging her guilt nor was she earnestly seeking God's face. She was

resenting that God would tell her to do something she didn't want to do. And thus the idea gets planted that we don't have to believe everything in the Bible to be good Christians. The daughter appeared to be living a good life, caring about other people, and is portrayed as a good example to follow.

The message was then that you don't need all of God's Word to be a good person, and that's the same message that's believed by many people today. Just listen to most eulogies. 'So and so was such a good person that they're in heaven with God now.' People think they go to heaven because of their goodness, and little is said about faith in God, trusting in Jesus, or remaining faithful throughout all of life's hardships.

So, God still says to us today, as He said back in Hosea's day, that He will return to His place and withhold His blessings from us until we acknowledge our guilt and earnestly seek Him again. Hosea hears this from God and begins chapter six by pleading with the people to return to the Lord. He tells the people to look around and see that the Lord has torn and struck them down, but to have hope that the Lord will heal and bind them up again.

Now, what hope does Hosea give to the people? Does he tell them that if they return to the Lord the wars will stop and peace will come? Does he promise them that the Lord will return prosperity with good trading relations with Syria and Egypt again? No, there's no such message here, nor should we be looking for any such message of hope from God. Hosea says that God will revive us and raise us up on the third day that we may live before God.

The people back then might've been scratching their heads at this message. They may've thought that this deliverance from their enemies will come in a few days, or a short period of time. However, we can look back now and see a much different and better deliverance that comes after three days so that we may live before God.

Jesus Christ the Son of God died for the sins of the whole world and after three days He was raised from the grave, so that we too may rise to eternal life and live before God Almighty in heaven. Hosea than says that because of this great promise of forgiveness for our guilt and the hope of eternal life with God we should press on to know the Lord. Don't you want to know who this God is whom you say you want to spend eternity with? If that's your hope to spend eternity living with God your Heavenly Father then don't you think it's about time we stop picking and choosing what we believe about God from the Bible?

Sure, there are things in the Bible that we may not like or understand, and that's why we gather together in worship and Bible Study to ask those questions of 'Why did God say that?'. We don't gather together to reject God's Word, but to press on to know the Lord better.

Yet, this Lord then makes an awful pronouncement in our reading, and it isn't that He's stepping away from His people only to let them be torn and struck down, but rather it's that their love is like a morning cloud, like dew that goes away early.

When you do something bad, like being unloving towards someone like a spouse, parent or child, or good friend, we usually like that relationship to be restored. We like to be forgiven. When God says that He forgives us He says, "I have blotted out your transgressions like a cloud and your sins like mist; return to Me, for I have redeemed you" (Isaiah 44:22). That restored relationship with God sounds beautiful until we put those words into the context of our reading. In the same way that God describes His forgiveness towards us He describes our love towards Him. People blot out their love towards God like a cloud. Their love disappears like the morning dew.

And so God says that when your love towards Him disappears like morning dew He will cut you up by the Words of His mouth. You'll hear His judgement through His prophets, and today through His pastors. God desires your steadfast persistent love and not your disappearing love. And when you return to the Lord, earnestly seeking Him, pressing on to know Him then He will revive you, heal you, and restore your relationship with Him.

So let's hear some of those encouraging Words from God and not just words from your pastor.

Psalms 103 says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good" (2-5a)

Isaiah said, "let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (55:7).

Hosea ends his book in the fourteenth chapter saying, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord; say to Him, 'Take away all iniquity. Accept what is good. . . . Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, 'Our God,' to the work of our hands. In You the orphan finds mercy.'" Seven chapters after our text the people finally return to the Lord and God responds to this confession of guilt and plea for mercy by saying, "I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for My anger has turned from them" (14:1-4).

The people repented and God returned to them. He forgave them, and loved them. As He also forgives and loves you through His Son Jesus who rose on the third day so that you may live before God your Father in heaven. Amen.