



13 | HOSEA 14

GOD'S GARDEN OF LOVE

In Christ, all is made new!

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Songs

It is Well with My Soul
Yet Not I but Christ in Me
O Lord My Rock and My Redeemer
Show Us Christ
Turn Your Eyes

Call to Worship:

Psalm 90:1-2, 12, 15-17

Lord, you have been our dwelling place
in all generations.

² Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

¹² So teach us to number our days
that we may have a heart of wisdom.

¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
and for as many years as we have seen trouble.

¹⁶ Let your work be shown to your servants,
and your glorious power to their children.

¹⁷ Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish the work of our hands upon us;
yes, establish the work of our hands!

Announcements

1. **Welcome** visitors.
2. **Services:** I want to remind you that due to the national emergency in our country, we are canceling all services outside of the Sunday 10:30am worship service until the end of March. We appreciate everyone looking out for each other and encouraging each other during this time.

Children's Devotional

Slide 1: Gardens

I love gardens. When my daughter Katie was a little girl, she helped me plan flowers all around our house when we lived in Joliet, Illinois. I just love gardens. I love to plant things and watch them grow, don't you? If you like to see things grow children, stand to your feet and stretch as far to the sky as you can like you are a growing flower. Wow, you all are growing so big!

God had a beautiful garden at the very beginning of the world. He called it Eden. It was the most beautiful garden you could ever imagine. It was a garden where he put the first man and the first woman, Adam and Eve. They loved God. They worshipped him in the Garden of Eden. God cared for them and loved them.

Slide 2: Eve and Serpent

One day, they were deceived by the devil in the form of a serpent. Instead of trusting God, Adam and Eve trusted someone else, who told them to sin against God. Not a good idea.

Slide 3: Leave the Garden

Because they sinned, they had to leave the beautiful Garden of Eden. God put angels with flaming swords there so they would not return. Everything on earth started dying; it was no longer so beautiful. But God promised a Savior to them.

Slide 4: Prophets

He sent prophets and told them there would come a man who was God, a Savior who would crush the head of the serpent, the devil.

They waited and waited and waited. Hundreds and thousands of years passed, and finally, the Savior was born into the world. Do you know his name? Yes, it's Jesus. By this time the world was filled with sin. Jesus was born in Bethlehem where it's very hard to grow anything, except Olive trees.

Slide 5: Garden of Gethsemane

When Jesus got older and was a man, one of his favorite places to pray was another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane.

You know why Jesus came into the world right? He had to restore God's garden and take away our sins. So when he was a man, he went to his favorite place, the Garden of Gethsemane, and he took upon himself the responsibility for all our sin. It was such an awful moment that he began to sweat great drops of blood.

Slide 6: Calvary

From there he went to the cross and died. Do you know why Jesus died? He died because he loves you. He died to take away your sin.

Now did Jesus stay dead? No! He rose again on the third day! Everyone say, "Hallelujah". Hallelujah is a Hebrew word that means "Praise the Lord."

Slide 7: Lion and Lamb

But the story doesn't end there. One day Jesus is coming again, and there will be a new Paradise Garden, even better than the Garden of Eden. It's a place where the lion and the lamb and the wolf will all lie down together. A place of perfect peace. One day Jesus will come again, and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes and we will live with him forever on a new earth and heaven will come down to earth. No more thorns in God's garden. Just joy because we will be forever with him! I can't wait to see Jesus, how about you! If you are excited to see Jesus say, "Amen!" Thank you, children.

Introduction

The title of our message today is "God's Garden of Love." This is our final message in Hosea, and it ends on a great high!

We are in the midst of an incredible panic in our country (with the Coronavirus pandemic). People are looking for answers, and we are in an unprecedented time of where people aware of their need for help and hope than perhaps any time since 9/11.

People need hope! And Hosea 14 delivers. In Hosea 13, we are faced with the devastation of death, and all the woes of broken planet earth. It's very much like the fear and panic we've experienced this week. There seems to be no hope.

But at the end of chapter 13 of Hosea, we get a glimpse. God says: I know all you see is death and devastation, but I'm coming to kill death. I'm coming to put death to death.

Jesus, our great Champion, as God puts on human flesh and has a wrestling match with death. And it's a match to the death. We know the end of the story: Jesus wins! Death is dead! Love has conquered!

Hosea 14 is like a new honeymoon. Remember Hosea begins with a love story gone terribly wrong. Hosea is told by God to marry a woman who becomes a prostitute. You know the story. She becomes penniless. Worthless. Her beauty gone. No one could love her. No one wants her. She's put up for sale.

The holy prophet goes to the slave market. There's his disgraced, unfaithful wife. He buys her back for the equivalent of 30 pieces of silver.

Despair is turned to hope. Beauty is turned to ashes. God restores the years that the locusts had eaten. Death is defeated. Gomer, for all intents and purposes is resurrected from the burial of her own sin.

It's it amazing saint, that God brings every child of God to this point? We were dead in trespasses and sins, but God, rich in mercy, raises us from death to life! Glory to our risen King!

Hosea 14 is like the marriage celebration. It's where God invites his people into his honeymoon Garden, the restored Paradise. He renews his love to Israel and to us.

In Hosea 14, we have not only Garden of Eden language, but we have Song of Solomon language. We are invited into God's Garden to experience his love and care and healing.

If I could put a New Testament verse as the main point of this message, it is this:

“Where sin abounds, grace super abounds” (Rom 5:20).

But you might ask: Pastor Matt, how do I get there? I want that super abounding grace! I want that unshakable hope. We all know we can't find it here on this earth. We can't even find toilet paper or bottled water.

What Jesus offers to each of us, indeed, to the whole world today is an unshakable hope: eternal life with him in Paradise Restored. Christ is returning at any moment in his Second Coming. He could come before this service ends. When that happens, he's going to wipe away every tear and restore peace on earth.

At that moment, everything and everyone will bow at his feet. Sin and iniquity and evil will raise the white flag of sufferer. Every disease, including the Coronavirus will be banished forever from earth. Satan, the one who is utterly and completely depraved and all his evil demons will bow and be confined to hell. And death, yes death will see Christ and will bow as a defeated foe.

But Christ promises peace not only when we see him face to face, but here and now when we “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” we have nothing to fear! He is with us!

1. RETURN TO THE LORD (14:1-3)

You say, how do I get that? Hosea 14 is the answer.

THE CALL TO RETURN (14:1)

14:1 | Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Return. That's not hard to understand. Stop sinning and return to me, God says. You need return. Jesus says, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Mt 11:28). That's what God says here. He's holding out his arms to you. Return! Come back sinner! Now this is written to proud Israel. They were not following God.

I believe this is a call for repentant faith. Return. Stop your sinning. Turn back to me.

For Israel, they were holding on to their **iniquity**. Lawlessness. They knew what they were doing was wrong, breaking God's law, but they felt like they had no choice.

In order to repent, open your heart to God's Word. Let the conviction of the Holy Spirit come. Believe God for forgiveness. Trust in his mercy through Jesus. Come to Jesus!

THE WORDS TO RETURN (14:2A)

God even tells them how to approach him in prayer. Turn your heart to me with sincere words!

14:2a | Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, "Take away all iniquity..."

We must not merely assume that God knows of our repentance, though he does if we are repentant. Rather, we must express our repentance verbally.¹ Words are nothing unless they come from the depths of the heart.²

John Bunyan said, "When you pray, rather let your heart be without words, than your words without heart."³

The Spirit of God alone can teach such words as we need. Sincerely come to God and confess you sin to him. Turn to him in prayer filled with sincere repentance.

Be Done with All Iniquity

We need to ask God to "**take away all iniquity.**" This is key to godly repentance. We must be radical in returning to God. You can't serve two masters. It's all or nothing.

THE COST OF RETURNING TO GOD (14:2B)

Some people try to repent with half-hearted repentance. There are various responses to sin that stand in the way of true repentance. We don't want to ask God to "**take away all iniquity.**" We want to keep a bit of iniquity by making excuses. Instead God says to be all in and take full responsibility for our own waywardness and depravity.

14:2b | ...Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.

When David repented of his sin of pride in numbering his vast army, he repented by purchasing what is today the Temple Mount. It was offered to him for free, but David says:

"I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing" (2 Sam 24:24).

¹ Boice, 112.

² Lange & Schaff, et. al, *Hosea*, 100.

³ John Bunyan. *Works*, vol 1, from "Bunyan's Autobiography" (London: Blackie and Son, 1850), 63.

Repentance is costly. Hosea says that there is a specific cost in repentance. Solomon names the specifics. We have to bring something beyond bulls and lambs and goats. We need to bring a repentant heart.

“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy” (Pro 28:13).

The cost of repentance is that we confess and forsake our sins and make no excuses. We bring it all out. We hold nothing back. Many are not willing to pay the price. The sewers need to open up. You need be radical in your repentance.

REJECT FALSE SAVIORS (14:3)

14:3a | 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.

Forsake False Saviors (14:3a)

“**We will not ride on [military] horses**” is the graphic way of denouncing all trust in military might for survival or expansion (cf 8:14; 10:14).⁴

“Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God” (Psa 20:7).

There is only one true Savior – Yahweh, Almighty God. No foreign nation could ultimately deliver them. No army, even riding on horses could save them.

If you are married, your spouse is a terrible savior. Your job, your money, your bank account: are all lousy saviors. Don't depend on your blessings and gifts as if they were God.

Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6).

Jesus is the only Savior. Trust in him alone.

Find Shelter in the Father's Love (14:3b)

Here we see the plentiful mercy of God towards those who acknowledge their helplessness.⁵

14:3b | ...in you the orphan finds mercy.

The point of Hosea's prayer is that the people of Israel have become orphans. Their adulterous mother, the idolatrous worship of Israel, will be dead; their father, Baal, will have given them no help. But this fatherless people will turn back to their one true Father, the refuge of orphans, and find shelter in him. They will be taken into captivity and there return to Yahweh. They will return to the land, no longer orphans, but as the “elect of God.” When that happens, Not-my-people will become the sons and daughters of the living God.⁶

⁴ Garrett, 240.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 272.

In repentance, we return to our God, and we are no longer orphans! We are sons and daughters of the most High God!

2. REJOICE IN GOD'S GARDEN (14:4-8)

This is where the whole book comes to a glorious crescendo and God promises to fully restore his love to Israel and to us.

THE GOD OF THE GARDEN RETURNS TO US

James says, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you" (Jas 4:8).

When you return to God, he returns to you. That was true for Israel. From the ruins of judgment, like plants or trees in a burnt forest, rising above the destruction, the people would again begin to grow under God's divine presence and blessing.⁷

The greatest loss in Eden was that Adam and Eve were ushered away from God's presence, from the Tree of Life. He sent them out of the Garden of Eden...

He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24).

The greatest loss in Eden for Adam and Eve as their loss of God's presence, from the Tree of Life. Their fellowship with God was broken. He sent them out of the Garden of Eden...

But here in Hosea 14:4, God returns. He comes back to Israel and begins to offer these great Edenic promises of a Paradise restored.

God's Presence Heals

This is incredible. Israel had fallen away, but if they were willing to return and trust in him by faith, he would completely heal their apostasy.

14:4a | I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely,

When we come to Christ, the Holy Spirit changes the nature of our heart as Ezekiel 36:26 says. He puts his Spirit in us. He **loves** us **freely**.

Dear saints, you who are in Christ, don't settle for the Baal gardens of your former lives. We need to be done with those gardens. Baal gardens are like plastic inflatable trees. They give instantaneous relief from the sun, but there is no fruit on them. And they wither quickly in the blistering heat. They are gone before we know it. God's garden offers us the "oaks of righteousness" that can endure the storms. It can give us the fruit we need. It does stink with sin and death like Baal's garden. God's garden emanates the life-giving aroma of life in Christ!

God's Presence Forgives

We read in Hosea (8:5), that God's "anger" was "kindled against" his people, but now in chapter 14, there has been a great change in God's disposition toward his people.

⁷ Boice, 113.

14:4b | ...for my anger has turned from them.

Isn't it amazing? When we come to God through Christ, he forgives us all our sins!

As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us (Psa 103:12).

Justification in Christ means it's not only just as if I've never sinned, but just as if I had obeyed God's law perfectly. When we trust Christ, it's the great exchange: my sin for Christ's righteousness. My record of sin is obliterated on the Cross. And Christ's record of righteousness is written down for me in the book of life. My sin is placed on Christ, and I'm robed in his righteousness. That's the only reason God's anger can turn away from us. We deserve hell. But Christ's death and perfect obedience satisfy God's just wrath against us.

THE BEAUTY OF THE GARDEN IS RESTORED

The amazing beauty of God's garden is restored! It's breathtaking! Can it be that God would be so kind to such horrible sinners like those in Israel? How about sinners like you and me? This is what Christ gains for us: restored fellowship in this picturesque garden of God's love.

Fellowship Restored (like Dew)

Now God begins to describe his garden of love.

14:5a | I will be like the dew to Israel...

God promises his fellowship to be like the dew to us. He will be like the early dew of morning—quiet but ever present and effective. The “dew” (14:5) signifies a return of God's favor. Dew is gentle (unlike a downpour, which can become a flood), but agriculture in Israel cannot survive without it. The evening dew waters the earth most copiously when it is most needed, in the summer, in time of greatest heat.⁸

God is your dew, child of God. When hand sanitizers and social distancing cannot help you, the Lord will never fail.

Fruitfulness Restored

14:5b | ...he shall blossom like the lily.

Oh, the ugliness of the fall. We were cursed physically. We all turn into raisins and die. But in Christ, death is defeated. Of course, when Christ comes, we'll have a new body, but here and now God makes our wilderness to bloom. God can restore beauty to our wilderness places. He restores “the years that the locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25).

“Where sin abounds, grace super abounds” (Rom 5:20).

If you've wasted your life, why waste any more? Just know that when you give your life to Christ, he will make you a fruitful vine.

⁸ Garrett, 274.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³ Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.

⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing (Jn 15:1-5).

Faithfulness Restored

14:5c | ...he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon,

This passage is very similar to what God promises us in Isaiah 61,

...to grant to those who mourn in Zion— to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he may be glorified (Isa 61:3).

God wants us to be “rooted and grounded” in the love of Christ (Eph 3:17). Some of the trees of Lebanon were palm trees that could bend in the fiercest storms without breaking. This is a picture of the saint of God who is rooted by streams of water (Psa 1:1-3).

Incredible Fruitfulness

14:6-7 | ...his shoots [*branches*] shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon.⁷ They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon.

God's garden is towering branches and sweet aroma. Like a tree with a great harvest of fruit, the believer's godly character will blossom.

Lebanon (14:5, 6, 7), the land of thick green forests and rivers, is the final word in each verse and symbolizes the overflowing fertility of God's garden in dramatic contrast to the bleak, almost treeless terrain of Palestine in Hosea's day.⁹ He speaks of the...

“trees of **Lebanon**” (14:5)

“fragrance like **Lebanon**” (14:6)

“wine of **Lebanon**” (14:7)

So much of the imagery is identical to the Song of Solomon, that it is likely the allusion is to the love ballad of Solomon for the poor Shulamite farm girl.

Solomon's song is about the love he shares with a peasant girl who becomes his princess. This girl was not someone who should have been on the radar of a great king. The Shulamite girl was so poor that her brothers made her a shepherdess—“they made me keeper of the vineyards” (Song 1:6). This was not a flattering vocation for a girl. Not

⁹ Hubbard, 242.

much was on her side. She was impoverished and without striking natural beauty. Yet Solomon loved her and wrote this letter as the standard for marital love in the Bible.

Everything about Solomon seeking a poor peasant farm girl to marry is meant to tell the greatest love story ever told. This is the story of how God can love the most unworthy people. God takes impoverished sinners and pursues them. He overcomes them with his relentless love. Lebanon's prominence in Solomon's Song is evident: once they are married, Lebanon is the lover's favorite romantic getaway (Song 4:8) known for its streams (4:15), wood (3:9), mountain (7:5; lit. 'tower'), cedars (5:15), and fragrance (4:11; cf 14:6) and gardens.¹⁰

What incredible fruitfulness we have in Christ! Psalm 1 tells us all about the blessed man...

He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers (Psa 1:2).

THE PROTECTION OF GOD'S GARDEN (14:7)

14:7 | They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow...

In all this foolishness and fear that we are going through in our country, of course we want to be wise, but child of God you must remember something: the safest place to be is in the center of God's will.

God's garden is our protection. When we return to God, we have the security of **dwelling beneath his shadow** and care.

Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty (Psa 91:1).

We are tended to by God himself. God is the vine dresser, our divine and perfect Gardener. People can see the difference in those who are cared for and tended to by God.

THE SOURCE OF FRUITFULNESS (14:8)

14:8 | O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit.

God has absolutely nothing to do with **idols**. As a good gardener, he has lots of tools in his pouch, and all other masters will no longer enslave you if you turn to Christ.

We are compelled to give all glory and honor to God for any fruit and progress we have made in the Christian life. In case we have forgotten, which we often do, God reminds us: **from me comes your fruit**. Jesus words are familiar: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5).

3. REHEARSE GOD'S PROMISES (14:9)

¹⁰ Burroughs, ibid.

14:9 | 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 upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

There are two types of people: those who follow God in the right way, and those who stumble over what God says. These are the humble and the proud. Remember:

“God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5).

THE HUMBLE ARE ESTABLISHED

The world is going to try to flood you with fear because that's all they know. But if you are wise, you will turn your eyes to Christ and to his promises.

There's something worse than the coronavirus and cancer and death! There is an eternity without Christ. That's wisdom. Be wise in this world. Love your neighbor. Do good during this time of testing.

Find someone to bless and pour out the wisdom and rich oil of Christ. Give the aroma of life to those around you. This is your time to shine.

How many of you can testify this morning with David:

I waited patiently for the Lord; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. ² He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps. ³ He has put a new song in my mouth— Praise to our God; Many will see *it* and fear, And will trust in the Lord (Psa 40:1-3).

THE PROUD STUMBLE!

The essence of verse 9, is that you must have a regenerated mind to understand all God's ways.

14:9b | ... but transgressors stumble in them [God's words].

“Transgressors stumble in them.” Without the new birth, sinners will stumble and trip up over God's words and truth.

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 3:24).

A.W. Pink defined the new birth. He said:

Regeneration consists in a radical change of heart, for there is implanted a new disposition as the foundation of all holy living; the mind is renovated, the affections elevated, and the will emancipated from the bondage of sin.

In your testimony of salvation, how did you know you were regenerated? Dear saints, we need to offer this lush and fruitful garden of God to the world.

Conclusion

When I was a kid, we used to boat on Lake Ponchatrain. One time it was really stormy. We were out there on the Lake, and the waves were 10 feet high and we thought we were going to be carried away to the ocean. We headed back to the calm waters of Tickfaw River.

Brothers and sisters, Christ is our calm water. He is our place of Refuge.

There is coming a day when God brings us to his final Garden Temple, the New Earth where heaven and earth is one. Though we are not there yet, the place of peace is here.

Dear child of God because the King of all kings died for you, there is now a restored place of fellowship and forgivingness and rest and peace: God's garden of love. Amen!