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Repentance Unto Life

Hosea 14

Beloved in Christ,

Apart from the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus there may not be a more acutely painful passage of scripture than what is found in the book of Hosea.

Remember that this is the letter where Hosea, God's prophet, marries a prostitute as a demonstration of God's love towards a straying Israel. By all accounts and despite Gomer's past they evidence a faithful, monogamous marriage, with three children. Yet, despite Hosea's love and sacrifice for Gomer she proves herself to be an adulterous bride (ch. 3) who *turns* from the love of her husband to other lovers who use and abuse her.

You can not help but feel Hosea's pain in chapter 3 when he has to buy his wife back from whoredom (ESV). As a married man, you cannot help but feel Hosea's broken heart. My heart cries out, "This is the prophet of God! The preacher of love, how can Gomer be so cold hearted and indifferent to such great love?"

Oh what a shock it is when we realize this letter is not about Gomer and her shortcomings but a vivid illustration of our coldheartedness and indifference to the Almighty's love for us. The people addressed in Hosea are the covenant community (1:2). We are the ones who have prostituted ourselves to other lovers. The opinions of men, the gratification of the flesh, the vanity of the world are our secret affairs with which the Lord is terribly angry. What is the solution for our cold heartedness?

After 13 chapters largely made up on pronouncement's of curses and wrath, God looks upon his people and pronounces a divine benediction. That there is a way for Israel to be restored to life once more, to fellowship in his presence, by way of repentance.

Theme: *By way of repentance we receive mercy*

Points:

1. What Repentance Looks Like (vv.1-3).
2. God Graciously Response to the Repentant (vv. 4-9)

Point 1: What Repentance Looks Like (v.1-3).

Thomas Watson said, "After Paul's shipwreck he swam to shore on planks and broken pieces of the ship. In Adam's fall we all are shipwrecked and repentance is the only plank left to swim to heaven". Thus it is the great duty of all who desire heaven to repent and turn to God.

The question on our minds then is, what does repentance look like? Are we to self-flagellate our bodies? To weep and moan until we experience sorrow? Or to try very hard and resolve to never sin again? These are very common but *false* conceptions of repentance. Rather, God gives us three marks of genuine repentance.

1.1 - Request forgiveness

The first aspect of genuine repentance is that we would request forgiveness. Notice in verse 2, “*Take words with you and return to the Lord*”. The prophet bids them as they approach God to prepare words that reflect the religion of their heart. They were not to draw near to God with their lips, but with hearts far from him (Isa. 29:13). Thus what is said to God must be an accurate reflection of what is in our hearts.

If you jump down to the last clause in verse 2, “For we will offer the *sacrifices* of our lips.”, is often translated as “*and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips*”. (The hebrew word is better translated as ‘bull’). Of course bulls had a prominent place in the Levitical sacrificial system, yet what God requests of the penitent in Hosea 14 is not the sacrifice of bulls, but of their lips. Thus, this verse should be understood as “Our words (lips) shall be the sacrifice upon the altar”.

What our God desires in repentance is not the offerings of bulls as burnt offerings (Hos 6:6). Instead God is calling them to the sacrifice of a mouth that confesses the reality of a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:15-17). We are to request forgiveness that comes from a heart broken by sins.

1.2 - Renounce sins

The second aspect of genuine repentance is the renunciation of sins. It is not enough to simply ask forgiveness and go back to our vices. We are called by God to hate our sin and resist temptations, i.e. renounce them. The besetting sin of the nation of Israel was creature comforts and idolatry. They were always looking to Egypt and Assyria for their confidence. In other

words, they were trusting in their own luxuries, their own power, and their own political alliances to provide for their needs. They were trusting in themselves (v.3).

God teaches us that a repentant sinner renounces all other trusts:

1. Assyria - The economic and military super power of the ancient world.
2. Horses - Israel's own national might.
3. Personal gods - The proposed protector and provider for individual families.

Please notice the comprehensive nature of God's call to renounce sins. We are not to trust in the world's governance for our security. We are not to hope in our nation's political leaders, climate, or economy. Not even our own personal insurance policies of retirement, homes, and families as our assurances of life. No, we may not put anything alongside or in the place of the one true God.

While not many of us are tempted to turn to Assyria for assurance, or to horses for hope, we are all tempted to rely on things other than God for prosperity and the future. Complete this sentence for me, 'I will be really happy when..' Or, 'my future will be secure if...' Is Jehovah the answer to these questions? Or did you say, 'when I get married, pass my exams, get a job'? From the east to the west, from north to south, from the capitol to your home, we are to only place our trust in God the Almighty. Now why does God call us to only place our trust in him? Look at verse 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*" (ESV). What God is saying to his people is that your alliance with Assyria is not what protected you, your economic and military might is not what has kept you safe, your personal insurance policies of household gods is not what has given you children, crops, or success. All of these things have come from me. And beloved is it not

true, that when we look back on our lives and every success we have ever had, all of our children, every good thing that takes place, we look back on our lives and say, “it wasn’t me, it wasn't them, it was God’s blessing that brought about this good end.” What God is calling them to is looking unto him and finding something better than their idolatry. This is the second aspect of repentance, renouncing idolatry and looking to him.

1.3 - Depend on God’s Mercy

The third petition of genuine repentance is to depend on God’s mercy. We have entreated God for forgiveness, we have renounced our wicked ways, now we must trust in his mercy. We are to come as humble beggars to God pleading that he would “*Take away all iniquity; Receive us graciously,*”. The beginning of right standing before God is the confession of guilt. *Take away all iniquity.* If we desire to be free from sins we must also confess that we are guilty before him. In other words, we must condemn ourselves to be set free. Notice the word *all* we are not only guilty of one crime against God, no we must acknowledge that we have committed many, numerous crimes in fact, against Holy God. Therefore we can’t trust in ourselves!

We plead also for God to *accept what is good* (ESV), that is to receive us graciously for *In you the Fatherless (orphan) finds mercy* (v.3). Here is an example of how we depend on God for mercy. The fatherless children in that time would have been so humbled, conscious of the bleakness of the future, aware of their nakedness and want, in desperate need of the aid, wisdom, and strength of a father. So too are we *fatherless* when we rely on our own prudence, our strength, and think that our aids on earth will keep us safe.

There is this one thing. The fatherless find mercy in God. Though I may be a spiritual orphan, humbled by providence, weak in strength, no hope for the future, though naked and exposed before God, we come to him as a child in need of Fatherly mercy, and receive it. This is how we must come to God in repentance, depending on his mercy alone for our hope and way of life.

Application:

1. It was the Valley of Vision that said, “I need to repent of my repentance”. Friends, a generic admission of wrongdoing as a child seeking to get out of a ‘time out’ is not repentance. No, repentance must come from the heart. Voice our need for forgiveness, name and renounce the sin, and depend on his mercy. Repentance is not simply admission, but an expression of our hearts.
2. It has often been said that repentance is a 180, a complete shift in our thinking. Before we repented we were going in another way, the way of sin, and hell. Now, we are turning and moving towards Christ, and eternal life. What does this look like?
 - a. Say for instance you struggle with vanity (caring only about beauty, people’s perception of you, and finding your value in other estimation). This is a brutal sin that can tear men and women apart. Repentance is not only an admission of its problem, and then as soon as our phone dings seeing what someone said about my latest Instagram post. No, when we recognize sin we must also seek its removal from our lives, making Christ the chief of our loves. Whatever our sins may be, we are called by Jesus to radical amputation, to cut off what causes us to sin and turn to the Lord Jesus.

What we see then beloved is that true repentance consists in a confession of sins, a forsaking of every other trust, a commitment to God and an exclusive dependence upon him. The question becomes, what will God's response be to our repentance?

Point 2: God Graciously Response to the Repentant (4-7)

Now the God fearer trembles before God's holiness. We ask, how can God receive such an unworthy sinner such as I? But look it is God who invites the sinner to repent (v.1) and his invitation is not ineffective or in vain. How can this be? How could God so gracious forgive a nation of Gomers? Could we forgive such adultery, abandonment, and betrayal? The prophet Hosea's answer is, God receives the repentant because of grace (v.4).

God teaches us in verse 4 that those who seek God's face do not seek in vain. His response is grace. John Calvin said, "God is ready to be reconciled and desires nothing more than to be received and embrace his people ". Beloved, what that means is that there will be no repentant sinner shut out of heaven. No, all who seek him by repentance *find favour in the eyes of God*.

2.1 - Gracious pardon

"*I will heal their backsliding*" (v.4a). The word used for Backsliding here is מְשׁוּבָה most often used to denote 'turning' or apostacy. Which is precisely Israel's problem! They kept

turning from the one true God to idols, nations, and other sins. Just like Gomer turned from Hosea.

I will heal, that is, that is to the repentant God by his regenerating Spirit shall heal our rebellion, subdue our backsliding, he shall destroy all defection. The sins of the repentant will not be their damnation, nor shall they stand against us in the judgement. God responds to repentance as a physician who graciously heals, and as Spirit who abolishes all offenses. Beloved, that's grace.

2.2 - Gracious love

“I will love them freely” (v.4b). Again the Hebrew term here for *freely* refers to the free will offering in the sacrificial law. You remember that the free will offering was not mandatory (Lev. 23:38) and was offered out an affection and love for God. What God is saying is that there is a bubbling up affection in God toward his people.

What is in us that demands affection and love from God? What in Gomer demands a bubbling up love and affection from Hosea. Nothing. The Lord is said here to freely love because in us though he finds no cause for love, nothing that merits affection, but yet we are recipients of divine love. Beloved, that's grace.

2.3 - Gracious mercy

Every human being who has ever lived, save Christ, has sinned against God and God by rights should punish every sinner according to their sins. Yet the prophet proclaims that the

repentant receives mercy not judgement. “*for my anger has **turned** from him*” (v.4c). Throughout this chapter we have seen God call Israel to *turn* from sins and turn to the Lord (vv. 1, 2, twice in 4). Now, in verse 4, it is not Israel who turns but God! He turns away his righteous anger.

Often throughout the book of Hosea the prophet switches quickly from warnings of judgement to promises of salvation. These things seem not to go together. How can in one moment the prophet proclaim judgement and then in the next breath blessing? The answer: Judgement does come upon God’s people, for sin cannot go unpunished, but it falls upon the Lord Jesus in our place. God’s anger is bearing down upon us to destroy us, but in repentance which is the fruit of living faith, before it reaches us God *turns* his anger and pours it out upon his Son. It is Christ who absorbs the terrible force of God’s wrath. God’s anger towards Israel was not swept under the rug, but deferred unto Christ, where the full punishment for sins was met. Beloved, that’s grace.

2.4 - Gracious Favour (5-7)

God does not begrudgingly welcome Israel and all repentant into fellowship with him, rather he is favourable towards the repentant in Christ.

God promises “*I will be like the dew to Israel*” (v.5). A promise of life and abundance towards the penitent. This new life was not from their own power but from God. Of course, dew comes from above not below. The blessing of eternal **life** rests on all of God’s church just as the dew rests on every blade of grass. *Dew* would have come every day during the Palestinian dry season. So it is with God’s blessing of his people! It is regular, consistent, and beyond what we deserve. We agree with Jeremiah, who declares “*his mercies never come to an end; **they are new***”

every morning; great is your faithfulness (Lam. 3:22-23). It is because of this *dew*, this blessing from God we are refreshed, nourished, and renewed.

The prophet uses two analogies to illustrate the fruits of grace, the *lilly* and the *trees of Lebanon*.

The blossoming of a Lily refers to the beauty that grace brings about. Our Lord Jesus makes this point in Matthew 6:28. The lily neither spins nor weaves yet God cares for it. The beauty of a lily is not dependent on cosmetics and makeup, nor does it seek admiration for it blossoms in hidden and unseen places. Thus, when we are reborn and enjoy the dew from heaven, our coldheartedness and insensitivity to God's love begin to give way to nobler traits. God's grace makes us gentle in our judgements, careful in our speech, and holy in our lives. Second, Israel shall also strike roots like the *trees of Lebanon*. Though the lily is beautiful but it is also frail and transitory. However, the church of the Lord is not frail, it has both the beauty of the lily and the strength and permanence of a mighty tree.

“Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right; The righteous walk in them, But transgressors stumble in them. (v.9)

Here is God's call to you this morning to repent and find mercy for sins.

Jesus' first sermon in the gospel started with *“Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand”* (Matt. 4:17), his last sermon before his ascension *“Repentance should be preached in my name”* (Lk. 24:47). He sent his apostles to proclaim this message of grace by way of repentance (Mark 6:12). God's call in verses 8 is a call to grace. God is calling you to repent and find life.

What God calls us to then is a faith that manifests itself in repentance. Abraham Kuyper said, *“Repentance is the personal conscience effect of regeneration”* (Pro-rege Vol. 1.111. 18).

Thus repentance is not only for the world. Repentance is for the encouragement of all who feel the burden of their sins, God has declared, he has sworn, that he has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and **live** and the whole Scriptures bear testimony to this blessed truth.

When we hear the word repent we often think of the fire and brimstone street preacher “Repent or die”. But we really should think of the life giving God who says, “Repent and live”. It is a gospel call. A call to forsake wicked ways and embrace he who is the way to heaven.

Application:

1. Oh brothers and sisters, are we not in desperate need of God’s grace? We need God’s grace to fight our sins, we need his grace to resist our flesh, the devil, and this world. Every day we need his grace. The prophet tells us where grace comes from, God’s good will towards us in Christ. Thus, we look to him for all we need. Need grace to raise your children? Look to Christ! Need grace to love your spouse? Your neighbor? Look to Christ! Come to God in his word, see him in the sacraments of baptism and Lord’s supper and be nourished in his life, death, and resurrection. Dear friends, Christ died that grace might fall like rain on the church of God. Come, come to Christ and find grace for all your needs.
2. We may not judge the sincerity of a Christian by their outward posture. All of these commands speak of an inward reality! The prophet Joel reminds us to *rend our hearts and not our garments*. Repentance is only for an audience of one. It is God who looks upon our hearts.

3. Repentance must be a continual part of our lives. Though we are Christians we still battle with the flesh part of our battle with the world, flesh, and the devil is repentance. The theme of the scriptures is *repent and believe*.

Conclusion:

So too for us has God set before us the way to life. We are more like Gomer than we care to admit, running quickly to sins that we know ultimately are unfulfilling and empty. For us God has provided a way to renewed fellowship and faithfulness by his son. When we sin, let us be quick to repent and find grace in our times of need. **Psalm suggestion: 81A**