

“Half-Hearted Repentance”

Hosea 6-7

7.16.23

Have you ever struggled with wondering if you could truly be loved? That was something I wrestled with in college. I knew people would love me if I treated them well. But what if I didn't treat them well? What if I was struggling and not able to love them well, would they still love me? Would they still be committed to me. I knew people could love me at my best. But could they love me at my worst?

The book of Hosea speaks to the question of being truly loved. As we have been studying it, two key truths have risen to the top of the pages. First, is God's amazing, unconditional love toward us- even in our worst God is totally committed to us. And second is God's unquenchable desire for a deeper personal relationship with us.

These two facts are life transforming. They settle the question if we can be totally loved. They settle the question if we can be loved at our worst. We have a God who is all in. We have a God who will never leave nor forsake us.

I hope that as we continue in this series through Hosea, you will find such security in Christ's love and His commitment to a relationship with you. I hope you will take steps to grow in this eternal relationship. I hope you will be all in with God as He is all in with you.

Last Sunday we saw in chapter 4 that God had a case against the northern tribes of Israel. They were guilty of having no faithfulness, no steadfast love, and no knowledge of God. Their condition was horrendous. The people were sinning against God. They were committing spiritual and physical adultery. They were lying and stealing and killing one another.

In chapter 5, we saw the consequences that were coming for the Israelites' disobedience. God was no longer going to protect or provide for them. He was going to leave them to their vices. He was going to remove them from the land and send them to exile far away.

At the end of chapter 5, we get a verse that fits in chapter 5 but also chapter 6. It speaks to how God is going to deal with them but also gives some hope if the rebellious will turn back. Verse 15, "I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me."

God is going to remove Himself until they acknowledge their guilt and seek after Him. As we turn to chapter 6, from first glance, it looks like the people have learned their lesson and turn back to God. But did they?

Please turn with me to Hosea 6:1–3 (ESV). Page 754 in the Red Bibles under the seats. "Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. ² After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. ³ Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth."

The first question we might ask is: who is saying this call to repentance? Is this Hosea encouraging the Israelites to turn back to God? Or is this the Israelites saying this statement to one another? Is it a familiar saying that they are repeating? We do not know for sure. But from the context, I take it as the Israelites saying it- hey let's do this.

What is repentance? Repentance is acknowledging and experiencing sorrow for sin. It is turning from sin- no longer desiring to sin. And it is turning to God. Repentance is doing a 180. Picture driving down the road and you realize that road is bad so you turn the car around and go back in the opposite direction.

In the NT, the Greek word for repentance means to changes one's mind so that one's views, values, goals, and ways are changed and one's whole life is lived differently.

The second question we might ask of the text is: did the Israelites repent or just go through the motions? Verse 4 seems to give the answer. God speaking, "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away." Hosea 6:4 (ESV)

God saw through their charade and questioned what to do with them. If we were God and had to deal with His people, we would be exasperated. We would be at the end of our rope. We would be done. God is never exasperated. He is never at the end of His rope. And He never gives up.

We can see from His response that

God is not pleased with half-hearted repentance.

It seems like the people were not coming to God to get right with Him. They were trying to get out of the pain of the consequences. They were seeking relief from the pain instead of showing remorse for their sins. They were looking for healing not for cleansing.

They were seeking a quick fix. Look at verse 2 again, "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him." They were thinking, if we just say this mantra then God will act fast. We will be out of our pain in no time- two maybe three days.

Warren Wiersbe writes, "The Israelites saw their nation in difficulty and wanted God to "make things right," but they did not come with broken hearts and surrendered wills. They wanted happiness, not holiness, a change of circumstances, but not a change in character."

After their sins have been made public, there are many people who seem to show repentance. But time demonstrates that they were not really sorry for their sins; they were just sorry they were caught in their sins. They didn't want to change for the better. They just wanted to get past the pain of being caught.

When a teen is caught lying to the parents about his/her phone usage and the phone is taken away as a consequence; is the teen showing remorse that he/she lied and damaged the trust built with the parents or for the pain of the phone being taken away?

When a spouse comes to me for counseling after being kicked out of the house for infidelity or domineering behavior, it is not always obvious whether their tears are because they are truly sorry for their behavior or they are sad about the consequences.

Those who are sorry about the consequences minimize their behavior and push to get back into the home as soon as possible. Those who are truly repentant see the gravity of their sins and don't push to get back into the home because they need to see change in their lives before they go back into the home if possible.

Quick, half-hearted repentance doesn't help us. It just prolongs our pain because without looking deeply inside, we don't get clarity on why we did what we did. We don't take steps to change. We are likely to repeat the sins that caused the pain.

True repentance looks internally to see the cause of the sin and roots it out so that the sin doesn't entangle you again.

Think of a yard with weeds. Half-hearted repentance just mows over the top of the weeds. The weeds are still there and will come back again. True repentance goes deep and digs out the roots so that they don't come back.

The Israelites also presumed on God. They thought their shallow response would get God to act. Verse 3 in the NLT reads, "Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press

on to know him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring.” Hosea 6:3 (NLT)

If I say the right words then I can get God to do what I want. If I just do the right things; if I look like I am interested in a relationship with God then I can get what I want. That is religion. Trying to do the right things to get God to accept us.

But God sees through religious acts. He looks at the heart and motives. He knows when people are true and when they are false. “People may be pure in their own eyes, but the Lord examines their motives.” Proverbs 16:2 (NLT)

What does God want from us? He spells it out plainly in verse 6, “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” Hosea 6:6 (ESV)

God desires loyal love and knowing Him intimately.

As we saw in chapter 4, the Israelites had no loyal love for God and because of that they chased after false Gods. They chased after things that degraded them. Hosea 6:7, 10 (ESV), “But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me...¹⁰ In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing; Ephraim’s whoredom is there; Israel is defiled.”

God didn’t want their fleeting and fickle love that was like “a morning cloud, like the dew that goes goes away early.” God wanted His people to have loyal love toward Him. He wanted their love to throw aside their idols and way of life and commit to Him.

And God wanted them to truly know Him more than their religious activities. God didn’t need their burnt offerings. The burnt offerings were designed to remind the people that they had sinned against God. They were designed to turn them back to the Lord in purity of relationship. But they were just going through the motions. They would

sacrifice animals for slaughter thinking that was good enough. Sadly, they didn't know their actions offended God because they did not know Him.

God doesn't want your religious actions as a substitute for time with Him. He doesn't want you to be so busy doing things for Him that you are not spending time with Him. He wants a growing relationship with you more than your religious activities.

Martha was busy doing things for Jesus. She was making a big meal while her sister Mary was spending time at Jesus' feet, connecting with Him. Martha told Jesus to get Mary to help with the work. Jesus said to Martha, "There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."

What if our hearts were in verse 3? "Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know him." Hosea 6:3 (NLT) That is what God wants for us. He wants us to know Him better each day. He wants us to pursue Him daily even as He pursues us. He wants us to trust and obey Him.

Apostle Paul knew the joy of pressing on to know Jesus. He wrote, "Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ." Philippians 3:8 (NLT)

One commentator wrote, "Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord" (v. 3), becomes our motto for daily living. Any day lived without a new discovery of an aspect of God's nature is a wasted day. If we do not know Him better this week than last week, we are settling for sameness. And if we can't say we have grown in knowing God, then we are backsliding into the future."

What steps are you taking to demonstrate loyal love to God? What steps are you taking to press in to the Lord so that you know Him better than you did the day before?

In chapter 7, Hosea goes back to the courtroom scene and reveals more of the Israelites' wicked condition. In this chapter, God describes the Israelites with several similes. A simile is a comparison of one thing with a different thing of another kind). Similes usually use the word "as or like." Here are a few well known similes that we use. "He slept like a baby." "She was busy as a bee." "The umpire was blind as a bat."

The first simile Hosea uses is "Like a hot oven"- Look at verse 4, "They are all adulterers; they are like a heated oven whose baker ceases to stir the fire, from the kneading of the dough until it is leavened. ⁵ On the day of our king, the princes became sick with the heat of wine; he stretched out his hand with mockers. ⁶ For with hearts like an oven they approach their intrigue; all night their anger smolders; in the morning it blazes like a flaming fire. ⁷ All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me." Hosea 7:4-7 (ESV)

If we want to make bread, we turn on the electric or gas stove and wait for it to heat up. It remains at the temp we allocate. Bakers back then used wood to heat an oven. And usually they had to keep stoking the fire to retain the temperature. Here Hosea writes that the people are like a hot stove that doesn't need to be stoked because they never get cold in their lust for evil.

Not only the people, but also the kings and princes are evil. They get drunk and put them in vulnerable situations. In verse 7 it reads, "And they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen." That speaks to a 20 year period when four kings of the northern tribe were assassinated by people often close to them and then the killers would step into the position as king. It was like king of the hill but instead of being shoved off, you were killed and the killer stood on top until he too was killed.

The second simile Hosea uses is "**Like a dove**"- Verse 7, "Ephraim is like a dove, silly and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria. ¹² As they go, I will spread over them my net; I will bring them down like birds of the heavens; I will discipline them according to the report made to their congregation. ¹³ Woe to them, for they have

strayed from me! Destruction to them, for they have rebelled against me! I would redeem them, but they speak lies against me. ¹⁴ They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds; for grain and wine they gash themselves; they rebel against me.” Hosea 7:11–14 (ESV)

Israel was being threatened by neighboring countries. Instead of going to God, they turned to Egypt and Assyria. Israel was like a dove that naively thought they could be protected. But these two countries were hunting doves and Israel was going to be their prey.

Verse 12 reminds the readers that God is more powerful than any nation. He will catch the Israelites in His net. He will choose either to protect or to discipline them. He was going to discipline them- at the hands of the Assyrians.

Instead of crying out to God from the heart they were wailing on their beds for the things of pagan gods.

Many skeptics believe that because there is such evil in the world, it is evidence there is no God. Or skeptics say God is either evil and doesn't care or does care but too weak to do anything.

Hosea paints a correct picture. God is real. He does care. And He is capable of removing evil but if He does remove evil, no one would be left standing. That includes the skeptics.

The Israelites deserved judgment and punishment. God gave them time to repent or to demonstrate they needed judgment.

The third simile Hosea uses is “**Like a treacherous bow**”- Verse 15, “Although I trained and strengthened their arms, yet they devise evil against me. ¹⁶ They return, but not upward; they are like a treacherous bow; their princes shall fall by the sword

because of the insolence of their tongue. This shall be their derision in the land of Egypt.” Hosea 7:15–16 (ESV)

A bow represents military power. Their bow was treacherous. The word “treacherous” here means “slack or loose.” A loose bow string cannot shoot a straight arrow. Israel’s military power was weak for God was no longer protecting them. They would be conquered in due time.

What did Israel fail to do with these warnings? Throughout chapter 7 we see that “They don’t call on God. They do not return to Him. They strayed away. They do not cry to God from the heart.”

God desired for Israel to repent- to acknowledge their sins, turn away from them and turn to God. But they only wanted a quick fix from the pain of the consequences.

Sadly, they would go through much more pain for their disobedience and would miss out on the wonderful blessings God had for them.

When Jesus entered the world, He changed everything. He went to the cross to be the payment for our sins. In the past, the people’s sins were before God’s face. After Christ, God forgets the sins of those who are Christians. He never brings them up again. He can’t. For He forgot them.

That is such great news to know that we can be completely forgiven. It is such great news that God will not hold our sins over our heads. He will not condemn us.

John Piper adds more encouraging news, “He never looks upon us with contempt because he’s always for us, never against us. He will always restore us and bring us unflinchingly to an eternity where there will be no grieving him, no quenching him, no displeasing him anymore.”

For the Christian there are two extremes when dealing with our sins. On one end, knowing that we are already forgiven for all our sins, we can minimize our wrongdoings. We can sin and go on as if it is no big deal. Though our sins are forgiven, our consequences are not. And sinning can distance us from God. Let us not minimize sins. Let us see them as enemies to fellowship with God.

The other extreme is seeing our sins as so big that we cannot forgive ourselves. We cannot move forward. We must live in the past mistakes we made. If this is you, what are you saying about Christ's sacrifice? What are you saying about God's ability to forgive?

Is Christ's sacrifice sufficient to pay for your sins? If so, then how can you still hold on to them?

Does God want you to remain in the past sins? Or does He want you to live victoriously?

Not forgiving yourself or not letting go of your past sins is living as the devil would want you to live- not God. God has forgotten your sins. Move on. Move forward in forgiveness and victory.

For reflection: are you growing in your knowledge of God? Are you being faithful to Him? When you fail, do you confess and repent of your sins and walk with Him or do you linger in your sins, either embarrassed or afraid to come back to God?

Let's pray o.b.g.