



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 14:1-9

“God’s Free Love”

TRANSCRIPT

This morning we are turning to the last of Hosea’s 14 chapters for our Scripture reading, and this will be, the Lord willing, the last of our messages on this great prophet and prophecy. Chapter 14 and verse 1. You notice as you read this chapter that many of the same things recur, but this is a very moving appeal on the part of God to the nation to return to him.

“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God,
For you have stumbled because of your iniquity.

Take words with you and return to the LORD.
Say to Him, ‘Take away all iniquity
And receive us graciously,

That we may present the fruit of our lips. (Incidentally, that’s a very vivid expression in the Hebrew text. It’s really “to present our lips as bulls” – yes, b-u-double l-s. Of course the background is the sacrificial system, and Israel ordinarily rendered animals to the Lord in responsive worship of him, and so what the prophet is saying in effect is not simply the animal sacrifices, but the reality that lies back of them. And so he asks that we may present our lips as bulls. That is, that there may truly responsive worship of the Lord as well as the bringing of the animals. In other words, ritual is not enough.)

‘Assyria will not save us, (they are to continue to say)

We will not ride on horses; (a reference to Egypt)

Nor will we say again, ‘Our god,’

To the work of our hands;

For in You the fatherless finds mercy.”

I will heal their apostasy, (we sometimes, in the 20th Century, like to trace everything not so much to sin as to sickness. For example, even things like alcoholism, they are spoken of as sickness rather than sin. Now you’ll notice there is some justification for it, though I’ve never heard anyone biblically justify the use of those terms. There is a sense in which apostasy, backsliding is something that needs healing. It is a spiritual sickness, not simply a physical sickness)

I will heal their apostasy,

I will love them freely,

For My anger has turned away from them.

I will be like the dew to Israel;

He will blossom like the lily,

And he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon.

His shoots will sprout,

And his beauty will be like the olive tree

And his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon. (I’m sure that the apostles in the New Testament studied very intently and intensively these great passages from the Old Testament. And when you note here the reference to Israel, like an olive tree, if you’re a student of Romans, you’ll remember that one of the most important sections of the Epistle to the Romans is chapter 11, and in that chapter, Paul uses the figure of an olive tree in the illustration of the unfolding of the purposes of God. In other words, Israel is related to the root of the olive tree for the reason that the promises of Abraham are the fundamental promises of Scripture. They are the natural branches, because they are given to them, confirmed to the patriarchs. The unnatural branches who are grafted in are the

Gentiles who believe in the present age, but since unnatural branches have been grafted in, how much more logical is it, and Paul will argue this is Scriptural as well, for the natural branches to be grafted in again into their own olive tree. So knowing that the olive tree was figurative for the Nation Israel, the apostle constructs his argument from it. This was one of the passages no doubt he had in mind.)

And his beauty will be like the olive tree

And his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon.

Those who live in his shadow

Will again raise grain, (It’s possible to render this second line “will return, they will raise” and in that case there would be an incidental reference to the Nation Israel’s return to the place of blessing. But that is a bit questionable. We’ll leave the text as it is,) will again raise grain,

And they will blossom like the vine.

His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon.

O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?

It is I who answer and look after you

I am like a luxuriant cypress;

From Me comes your fruit. (We frequently speak of an individual not conforming to the best of literary style if he mixes his metaphors. Well, the prophets do not feel the necessity for following our rules of good literature. You’ll notice the mixing of the metaphor if you know as, no doubt, many, if perhaps not all of you, know that the cypress does not bear any fruit. And there are other instances of the same thing here, but it’s very suggestive. “I am like a luxuriant cypress,” because the cypress was the evergreen tree, and thus it always, in a sense bore its fruit.) From me comes your fruit. (The cypress becomes typical of the tree of life, and therefore, from me comes your fruit indicates that everything which comes from life comes from the Lord.)

Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; (by the way, this is for me and you)

Whoever is discerning, let him know them

For the ways of the LORD are right,
And the righteous will walk in them,
But transgressors will stumble in them.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these words from the Prophet Hosea, so meaningful to us, so revelatory of the great love, the great sovereign love that God has for his people. We are so thankful, Lord, that we are able to read the Scriptures under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, and understand some of the things that are there for those who by Thy grace would know Thee. We know, Lord, that the essence and the fullness of true life is life in the knowledge of God. And Lord, we pray that through the study of the Scriptures, through meetings such as this in which the Scriptures are expounded, we may come to an experience of the life of God.

Lord, give us a deep compulsion to know Thee. We pray that everything else that is a part of our life may take its proper secondary place, and that our chief goal and aim in life may be to know Thee. And we ask Lord, in the light of these great promises that Thou wilt heal our backslidings and apostasy, that in the days that remain to us, that may be our passion.

We thank Thee for the privilege of serving Thee in this year and this day. We ask Thy blessing upon our country, upon the whole body of Christ, scattered over the face of this globe. We also pray, Lord, for those who are specifically mentioned in our calendar of concern. We pray for this assembly of believers, its elders and deacons and members and friends. It’s ministries over the radio, through the printed page, by the tapes, by the Bible classes and in other ministries that our Lord Jesus Christ may be exalted and that men and women and children may be drawn to him. O God, deliver us from the secondary things. Enable us to settle our life upon the solid rock through the relationship with Thee through Jesus Christ who is that rock.

We commit this meeting to Thee, the remainder of it, the singing of the hymn, the ministry of the word. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] It seems strange to speak of God’s love as being free love, because in our day, we think of free love as being love without any kind of moral constraint and therefore something upon which one should look down. But free love is really love without restraint, and in a sense, we may say that God’s love is free, in the sense that there are no constraints without him upon which the love depends. And so we’re speaking this morning about God’s free love.

It is of course in accordance with the greatest principles of morality, because God’s will determines what is right and what is wrong. What is right is what he wills. And so God’s free love is our subject, and we’re looking at the 14th chapter, the final chapter of this great work of the prophet of unconditional love, the Prophet Hosea.

We have noticed as we have gone through it, at least I have sought to make that very evident, that loyal, sovereign, love – or to use the Hebrew term, *chesed*, is the theme of this tenderest soul of all the prophets, and it’s caught, I think, in the second line of the fourth verse, “I will love them freely.” Sin, judgment and love are three words around which the theme is developed in the days of the decline and the departure from Israel, or from the days of Jeroboam II to the Assyrian captivity. The days of 755 B.C. to 722 B.C., that was the time of Hosea’s ministry to the Northern Kingdom.

Chapter 14 contains nine verses, but these nine verses recount the landmarks of Israel’s journey into the far country, and they are recounted amid fresh calls to repentance grounded in the extended and prevailing gracious love of Yahweh. Notice verse 2, “Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him, Take away all iniquity and receive us graciously.” And so the thought of the need of repentance, and then the thought of the love of God and the gracious response that God gives to us is set out there.

In the fourth verse, “I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.” And then in the 8th verse, the prophet writes, “O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols. It is I who answer and look after you. I am like a luxuriant cypress. From me comes your fruit.” You see, those who had become involved in the worship of Ball, their fruit,

the produce of their fields, the children of their family, were ultimately dependent on a right relationship to the false god, Baal. But God stresses through the prophet that it is from him, their true Lord and master – Baal, remember, means “lord” or “master” – the true Lord and master, all of Israel’s fruit and well-being are to come.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon whom I often quote has a sentence with which he begins one of his studies on the 14th chapter of Hosea that I’d like to use as a kind of theme text. Mr. Spurgeon says, “This sentence, I will love them freely, is a body of divinity in miniature. He who understands its meaning is a theologian, and he who can dive into its fullness is a true master in divinity.” Now, after over 35 years of teaching in theological institutions, that text that Mr. Spurgeon has begun his study with, I can say is true to the facts of theological life. This sentence is a body of divinity in miniature, and in fact, if you could come to an understanding of it, if you’re not already in understanding of it, you would have a body of theology in miniature. If you would understand its meaning, you would be a theologian. And if you could dive into its fullness, you would be worthy of a master of theology degree.

The reason I say that is for 35 years I have taught literally hundreds of theological students, and have had them in my classroom for many hours, and many of them have left the institutions with degrees in theology who do not understand, “I will love them freely.” How sad, but how true. I have students today in the institution in which I teach, who will finish three years of study and be given a master of divinity degree, who are confused about “I will love them freely.” And there are some who attend schools and attend for four or five or six years and get other degrees, and still do not understand, I will love them freely. It is a body of divinity in miniature, and if you understand it, you are a theologian, and if you can really understand all of the implications of it, you should have master of theology degree.

Now some of you may be sitting in this audience smugly and saying, Isn’t it nice to have that knowledge, because we’re in Believers Chapel? Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon, lest the uncircumcised Philistines from other churches in the vicinity and elsewhere hear, but the vast

majority of people who attend Believers Chapel do not have a sound knowledge of that simple sentence, “I will love them freely.” I confess that very sadly. It’s often been the subject of prayers on my part.

But in the final analysis, truth is understood by divine illumination. And we expound the truth, we seek to make it plain and clear, but there is a limit beyond with a man cannot go. So, if by God’s grace you come to understand, “I will love them freely,” then you’re a theologian, proper theologian.

And furthermore, Mr. Spurgeon could have added this. If you come to understand this, your life will be transformed. Cannot help but be. So may God lead us into the truth of that simple line, “I will love them freely.”

Now this comes first of all in a chapter in which the prophet appeals to the nation to repent, to turn. Guilt and punishment are not all that faced Israel. There was the possibility of acceptance, and isn’t it something that stands out in Hosea that God just will not give up on the Nation Israel. He just will not give up.

We talk about the perseverance of the saints, but oh, the perseverance of the Savior. And saints persevere because he perseveres in preserving them, and in ultimately bringing them into the possession of the things he would have them to possess. Return O Israel to the Lord your God. One might say, For goodness sake, Lord, turn to some other people. Israel is not responding, and you’ve given them enough. But he continues. He will not give up.

When one looks at the Hebrew text of that opening line, one notices immediately a very impressive kind of wording. Now most of us in this audience may not be acquainted with, probably aren’t acquainted with many of the details of Hebrew grammar, some things of course we cannot be absolutely certain about, but the rabbis made comment about the fact that the expression used in verse 1, “Return to the Lord your God,” is slightly different from the statement in verse 2, “Take words with you and return to the Lord.” And the first construction, a difference in preposition, the preposition “of” instead of the preposition “el,” that expresses a very warm appeal to Israel, “return

to the Lord your God.” They spoke about a complete, wholehearted turning in contrast to the statement of verse 2 which is more prosaic, “Return to the Lord.” In other words, for God, the marriage still holds.

Gomer has committed adultery, but Hosea is still anxious for the relationship to be resumed. All impressive illustration of the love of God, which for the Nation Israel still holds. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Your sin has made a difference. It has separated you from your God.

Now one might ask, O Lord, how shall we return? And the prophet tells us how. “Take words with you and return to the Lord.” Many years ago when I was in the insurance business and I had just been converted, and I attended the church of which I was a member, the South Highlands Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and I began, after I was converted, to attend the services regularly on Sunday morning. We had a minister who was a Christian man, but a typical – I want to say Presbyterian minister – but, and he was that, but he was typical of so many preachers today. They do not want to teach biblical doctrine, but rather teach little moral, ethical essays, which may be sound in essence, but nevertheless, do not communicate any great biblical teaching.

So I went in one morning shortly after I had been converted and began to study the Bible a bit, and his text that morning was “Take with you words,” the words of the Authorized Version. We have here, “Take words with you.” Take with you words, Hosea chapter 14. Well, I kind of glanced down the page, and I saw this had something to do with the future of Israel, and I had been converted through someone who believed that Israel had a national future. I look forward to a message in which some unfolding of what lies before us might be told out.

And he took the text, and he repeated it three or four times, and he said, “This is a good guide for us in our daily life.” And when we walk down the street, as the next morning I was to do -- I was to walk down Third Avenue toward my office building -- we should take with us words, words of cheer, words of favor, of happy appreciation of my friends, and the message then was a just a little moral, ethical essay for about fifteen minutes on how to say the right things to my friends.

Well, it had an effect upon me, because I looked and I thought, that is so different from the context that I sure would like to be able to preach myself. And it was one of the things that was used of God to move me, ultimately, to the teaching of the word of God myself. I said to myself, I’m sure that I can teach the word in any great way like the person who led me to the Lord, but at least I can teach what is found in the text without launching out into little ethical, moral essays. So, take with you words.

What is Hosea speaking about? Well, he is calling upon the Nation Israel to repent, and he is actually giving them the words that they should say to the Lord God in repentance for their sin. “Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to him, take away iniquity and receive us graciously.” In other words, confession is to mark Israel’s return to the Lord.

What are they to confess? Well, they are to confess their sin. But they’re also to confess their misplaced trust. Assyria will not save us. We will not ride on horses. In other words, they are to renounce any trust in Egypt, they are to renounce any trust in Assyria. So they are to confess their sin, they’re to confess their misplaced trust, because you see, like so many people in 1984, we think that our well-being and our stability lies in proper diplomacy. In other words, if we have a good foreign policy, then the United States can rest secure in its sense of security. But there is no security apart from the Lord God.

And let me say this. You know I don’t talk much about politics. But if Mr. Reagan should have the finest foreign policy in world – the finest foreign policy would be trust in God – but if he should have the finest foreign policy in the world, or whoever succeeds him, we would have no sense, true sense of security in this world. So, diplomacy. They are to confess that they have been seeking to have proper relationships with Assyria to protect themselves from Egypt, and proper relationships with Egypt to protect themselves from Assyria, and they’re forgotten that true security lies this way, and not this way [Johnson gestures].

And they are to do this, this confession of sin and misplaced trust, and confession of idolatry. They are no longer to say, to the work of their hands, “Our god.” They are to do it without reservation. What God wants of course is reality of personal trust in him.

But they’re also to do this with confidence, and we learn that from the last statement of verse 3, for in Thee, the orphan finds mercy. This word, “finds mercy,” is a word that comes from a noun, *racham*, which means “the womb,” a woman’s womb. And so mother-love is referred to here. And in the expression, “in Thee the fatherless finds mercy,” there is an expression of the mother-love of God, for our great God has not only the Father affection and the Father love, but also the mother-love. The special mark of the God of Israel lies in this fact.

The gods of the heathen were strong, they were powerful. They were gods who were also fearful, they caused fear. They also had all kinds of power, but in the heathen gods, there was no mercy and compassion. And the thing that marked out all of Israel’s compassion from all of the other gods was the fact of his mercy and compassion. God’s name does not carry much weight in politics. It does not carry much weight in diplomacy. But in God’s name is true refuge.

Now the answer of Jehovah to repentance is outlined in verse 4 through verse 8. “I will heal their apostasy. I will love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.” And when God speaks, the scene lights up, and one of my old teachers says, “with a mountain-like accumulation of promises.” I’d like for you to notice three things. First, that he promises healing.

In fact, there are two movements here that you can note. If you read this chapter over and over, you will notice these two movements very plainly. Notice verse 4, I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely. Verse 5, I will be like the dew to Israel. And then we have the other side, not simply the sovereign determination of the Lord God as one of the movement, but also the “he wills” or “they shall.” In verse 5, I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like the lily, and he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. His shoots will sprout and his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like the cedars of Lebanon.

In other words, the “he will” of the sovereign determination of God is followed by the appropriate response of “they shall” or “he will.” One is God’s action. The other has reference to the results of God’s action.

Now when we think of what happens when he heals their apostasy, what are we talking about? Well, we’re talking about several effects. First of all, the forgiveness of their sins. That is a magnificent blessing, isn’t it? I will heal their backsliding. I will heal their apostasy. Well, that involves the forgiveness of sin. And so Israel’s departure from the Lord God as they return to him is forgiven, for in him the fatherless finds mercy. There is the removal of the effects of the apostasy and backsliding also. Anyone who knows anything about spiritual things knows that when we depart from the Lord God, be it in indifference to the things of the word of God, be it by virtue of some specific sin, there is the clouding of the relationship to the Lord God. There is the breaking of communion. There is the sense of distance between the Lord and ourselves.

Everyone who lives in the breaking of communion with the Lord God knows the suffering inwardly that comes from that. David speaks about it so brilliantly and so truly in the 51st Psalm. Listen to some of the things that the great king said,

“Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
And in sin my mother conceived me.
Behold, You desire truth in the innermost being,
And in the hidden part You will make me know wisdom.
Purify me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Make me to hear joy and gladness,
Let the bones which You have broken rejoice.
Hide Your face from my sins
And blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation
And sustain me with a willing spirit.”

Yes, we lose the joy of our salvation. We lose the joy of the sense of relationship to the Lord God. All of those things characterize the person who is out of relationship with the Lord. And that is one of the effects of “I will heal their backsliding” – the joy returns. The relationship of communion returns. The face of God is now turned toward us. There is the removal of course of judgments, of discipline, that are ours. Oh, how many things we suffer because we turn our face from the Lord God in backsliding and apostasy.

So many of the losses we experience, in so many ways, so many of the things that we are forced to experience are traceable to failure to keep short accounts with the Lord God. That’s healing that is promised.

Now, in verse 4, in the second line, “I will love them freely.” Loving. How can he heal our apostasy? How can he heal our backsliding? Why he can do it because of his sovereign love. I will love them freely. If you’ll take that Hebrew word, and you can do this even if you don’t know Hebrew. You can look in a concordance, look up that Hebrew word, and see how it is translated in the Old Testament, and you will find that this word, *ndabab* is most of the time translated by the expression “free will offering.” So, I will love them like a free will offering.

What does it mean, to love freely? Well, it means to love with perfect spontaneity. It means to love apart from outside restraint. It means to love with no inducement whatsoever. In other words, we’re to love because he loves. To love sovereignly, the source of the love exists in God

himself and not in man. There is no inducement from man. It is a sovereign love. It’s a free love. O if you could just understand this, I’d give you one of my master’s degrees in theology.

Now, think of Mr. Spurgeon’s statement: “The sentence is a body of divinity in miniature. He who understands its meaning is a theologian, and he who can delve into its fullness is a true master in divinity.” Inducement. We know all about that, don’t we. Wasn’t it President Eisenhower who had an aide who received a famous gift as a kind of inducement? Oh, of course he denied it, and it may not have been an inducement to him, but that’s characteristic of our day, isn’t it? To give some politician some gift in order to induce some favorable response from it. In fact, our reporters like to major on things like that instead of the really substantive things. They love to be able to find some little thing like this in order to embarrass some politician. Pat Nixon was embarrassed. Nancy Reagan has been embarrassed, and no doubt whoever succeeds here will be embarrassed, and no doubt others will be, too, by inducements.

Our local and state officials, we’ve had some magnificent illustrations of this in Texas politics in recent days: inducements, people responsive to particular inducements. God does not respond to inducements. I will love them freely. I will love them like a free will offering. That means he does not love because of our prayers. He does not love because we weep and cry before him. He does not love us because we do works. He does not love because we give alms.

It may startle you, but he does not love because Christ shed his blood. As a matter of fact, now your degree is at stake. He does not love because Christ shed his blood. Christ shed his blood because he loves. In other words, the work of Christ is the fruit of the love of God, not the cause of the love of God. There isn’t any cause in us that is responsible for the great love of God toward us.

When the saints of God are in heaven, what do they praise? When you turn to the Book of Revelation and you look at those magnificent hymns of salvation, that great multitude in chapter 7 that was called out of the Great Tribulation, what do they praise? Do they praise the fact that they exercised out of their free will trust in God, and God rewarded them with eternal life? Answer me! Is that true? No, you know it’s not true.

What do they praise? Do they praise the fact that they prayed? That they responded? That they exercised of themselves faith in God? That is, that their faith was of themselves? Do they trace their salvation to anything in themselves? Do they say, God, you gave me a little bit, and I increased it by my response, and you rewarded us with eternal life? No, if you find anyone in heaven like that, the angels would throw them over the walls of the city.

What do they praise? They say, we washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb. It is not anything in themselves to which they appeal. It is the Lord God and his sovereign love of them expressed in the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross. I will love them freely, God says. He will love them without any inducements, he will love them sovereignly, for his love isn’t eternal love. You see, there are two great things that one must remember here. There is nothing in man to attract the love of God to man for the simple reason that his love existed before there was a man. The love of God is everlasting love. And man issues at a later date. His love is eternal. We are not eternal. His love is eternal, everlasting.

And there is nothing in man that can be effectual hindrance to his love. Can you think of any sin that can keep you from the experience of the love of God if God has determined to set his love upon you? There is no sin. Otherwise, God wouldn’t be sovereign. You see, man would be sovereign. Man’s sin would overcome God. We’d say, Ah, you see, there is a man who committed such a sin that he has finally overcome God and his magnificent grace. There is no such thing.

His love is a sovereign love, and his love overcomes all obstacles, and ultimately brings its objects into relationship with him. Scripture says, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.” But our friends would like to have us interpret that as “I will have mercy on whom *I can* have mercy.” There’s a theological degree’s difference between those statements. I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy. That’s Scripture.

But then there are those who teach that God is a person who will have mercy upon whom he can have mercy. In other words, there are things in man that prevent the sovereign work of God

from reaching its conclusion and the restoration of a relationship of eternal salvation with a lost sinner. I will love them freely, Scripture says. I will love them sovereignly. My love is eternal.

The reasons why the divine love is independent of everything finite include these things. It’s eternal, therefore it cannot depend upon anything in time, but everything finite is in time. It’s sovereign love. The decree to love depends upon God’s good pleasure, the Bible says. Do we really read these things and understand them, ponder them? He has blessed us according to his good pleasure. Not according to what he finds in us, but according to his good pleasure. Therefore, our salvation doesn’t depend upon our good pleasure. It depends upon his good pleasure.

And then this divine love is an immutable love. It’s said to be unchangeable. Now if it is an immutable love, it cannot be a love conditioned upon the decision of human will, because the human will is finite. And if the human is finite, it is also mutable. And the immutable love of God cannot possibly rest upon the mutable will of finite man. Think, if you’re gonna get this degree in theology.

And a conditional expression of the love of God is incompatible with a divine foreknowledge. God cannot foreknow an event unless it’s certain. We know it’s certain because he already foreordained it. But just forget that moment for a moment. God cannot foreknow an event unless it’s certain, but it cannot be certain if it ultimately depends upon a finite will, for a finite will is mutable, and therefore the will of God cannot depend upon it. I will love them freely, Hosea says.

Paul echoes it. Jesus fully expounds it. The prophets and the apostles and the Lord himself agree; God loves freely! How can we express Christian doctrine in any other way than that? He loves freely. He loves sovereignly. The cause of his love rests in God and in his eternal being. I might also say, not only would it mar his sovereignty, if he could only say, I have mercy those upon whom I can have mercy, it would be a slur upon his super-abounding grace.

If he were to say, he can love sinners, but if a person were to become such a sinner, finally he cannot love them. No. As a matter of fact, the Bible speaks specifically to that point. It says, where sin abounded, grace was defeated [pause]. There’s some of you that are on the way to a degree [laughter]. Some of you may become theologians. Where sin abounded, grace did – may I translate

Paul’s expression – super-abound. Where sin abounded, grace did super-abound. There is no human sin that cannot be conquered by the immutable, eternal, everlasting love of God in Christ.

Well, the prophet in the last few verses, verse 5 through verse 8, speaks about divine blessing. He says, I’ll be like the dew to Israel. You see, the dew was the source of the moisture of the land from late spring to late fall. I’ll be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily. It’s nice to have lilies in your yard this year. I have some lilies. I carry this around to measure them [unknown visual aid used, followed by laughter]. The other morning, one of my lilies from end to the other – these are just day lilies, incidentally – seven inches across. Grown in sovereign grace [laughter]. Even your lilies are affected if you have right doctrine. [Loud, sustained laughter] No, but it was seven inches across.

You know, there’s something interesting about lilies. Lilies have an abundance of blooms. Some day lilies, believe it or not, I am told – my sovereign grace is not sovereign enough; I haven’t had this many blooms yet – on one plant, fifty blooms. That’s abundant lily growth, abundant flowering. But you know, lilies have very shallow roots. They’re weak roots. And so he goes on to say, he will blossom like the lily, but he will take root like the cedars of Lebanon. Those cedars are noted for striking their roots down deep into the ground. The cedars of Lebanon.

Over in the east, when they speak about something being as solid as the rock of Gibraltar, they say, “Solid as the cedars of Lebanon.” That’s what he’s talking about there. His shoots will sprout, his beauty will be like the olive tree. A fruitful tree, beautiful tree, fragrant tree. Those who live in his shadow will again raise grain. And they will blossom like the vine. His renown will be like the wine of Lebanon. Prosperity, in other words, will characterize the nation in the last days, and then security. And finally in verse 8 he says, “O Ephraim,” – you know, several times in this book he’s said, O Ephraim, Ephraim he said in chapter 11, how can I give you up? How can I surrender you, Israel, here? “O Ephraim, what more have I to do with idols?” In other words, what more have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like a luxuriant cypress. The evergreen cypress, characteristic of that which is everlasting – a beautiful type, perhaps of the Tree of

Life itself – thus, from Me comes your fruit. And this again is a sideways look at the baals. Fruit does not come from them. Those fertility gods are not able to do anything from you. From me comes your fruit. Look at the bulletin today. Read the right side of the page. Mr. Spurgeon has an exposition of that little line. It’s a good exposition. From me comes your fruit, from the Lord God.

And then, as a true preacher, the prophet concludes with an appeal, an appeal based probably on the whole of the book. It’s kind of a summary of everything in the book. Whoever is wise, let him understand these things. What is the wise man? He’s the intelligent man. He understands such things as, I will love them freely. And then he says, “Whoever is discerning” – Ah, that’s the man who acts according to his intelligence, for the ways of the Lord are right. Thus, sin separates from God. Sin blinds our vision. Sin leads to idolatry. It leads to putting secondary things in the primary place and tertiary things in the primary place, and idolatry results. But electing love, electing, sovereign love is eternal and it prevails. And in Christ it reaches its fruition. So, God makes no terms with sin. He heals by eternal love.

If you’re here today, let me say, as an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus has offered the sacrifice that is the expression of the love of God for the people of God, and if there is something deep down within you that says, yes, I am a sinner, I do need the forgiveness of my sins. I do need my apostasy healed, we invite you to come to Jesus Christ. And in coming to him and receiving him as your personal Savior by his grace, you learn that you have been the object of the eternal, sovereign, undefeatable God of love. Come to Christ, believe in him. Trust in him. Trust in his sovereign love. See your salvation issue from the heart of God, issue in the sacrifice of Christ and your response to it. Come to Christ. He’s not a god like the gods of the heathen. He’s a God in whom the fatherless find compassion and mercy. Come. Come now. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, how grateful we are for these magnificent words from the Prophet Hosea, a man with whom we look forward to having fellowship, a man who by Thy grace Thou didst give an understanding of sovereign love. How grateful we are to be ministered to by him from Thee.

We’re grateful, Lord. We pray that this great love that Thou hast shown us in Christ may motivate us to be useful servants of Thee in the generation in which we live. O God, deliver us from sin, deliver us from backsliding. Deliver us from failure. We are so prone to turn away from Thee. Deliver us from idolatry. Deliver us from the things that displease Thee. Cause us to rejoice in our great sovereign God, and by Thy grace cause us to serve Thee faithfully.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.