



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 3:1-5

“Transcendent Love, or the Return of the Adulteress”

TRANSCRIPT

We’re turning to Hosea chapter 3 verse 1 through verse 5 for our Scriptures reading. And as our bulletin indicates, our subject for today is “Transcendent Love, or the Return of the Adulteress.” And beginning with verse 1, the prophet continues in his prophecy,

“Then the LORD said to me, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her husband, yet an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.”

Now let me make just a comment here regarding verse 1, concerning the expression “loves a woman is loved by her husband.” Now that is a possible rendering, and the reason it is a possible rendering is the fact that the word translated “husband” is a word that simply means “companion,” and consequently, since it means simply “companion,” its meaning it sometimes is determined by the context. A husband is a companion, but also may be another man than the proper husband. But in this case, it is more likely to be that, and so we probably should render this, “Go again, love a woman who is loved by her paramour, or her illicit lover” – her companion – “and (instead of “yet”) is an

adulteress, even as the LORD loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.

Raisin cakes were cakes that were often used in cultic feasts. Sometimes they’re used in contexts that do not indicate necessarily that they are things were used in the worship of idols, but obviously in this case they are things that were used in the worship of the fertility, Baal gods. And so the raisin cakes here are representative of Israel’s love of those things which they thought that the false baals, the false gods gave her.

Now Hosea responds by saying,

“So I bought her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley.”

Now, the homer and a half represents a certain amount, which combined with the fifteen shekels of silver may represent, simply, thirty shekels of silver. And when we discuss the text in a moment, we’ll try to point out its relationship to Gomer.

“Then I said to her, ‘You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you.’ For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar and without ephod or household idols.

Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD (this is a word that means “to fear” and “to come trembling;” if it means fear, it means fear in the sense of reverential fear, the fear of awe) and to His goodness in the last days.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. And for a few moments, let’s bow our heads before the Lord in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the ministry of Thy word. We thank Thee for the word which Thou has preserved for us and for the marvelous way in which we are told of man and of God and of the relationship between men and God.

And we thank Thee for the story of the history of salvation that is contained in the Scriptures, and how in the beginning of the earliest periods of Old Testament history, Thou didst indicate something of the divine purposes which Thou hast devised for men. And we are so grateful, Lord, that as the years have passed, Thou hast marvelously guided and superintended human history in the salvation of men and also in the glorification of the triune God.

Today, Lord, we worship Thee. We give Thee praise and thanks for the goodness shown to us. Thou hast been marvelous in lovingkindness and goodness and mercy and in sovereign grace. And we thank Thee for the fact that through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we have brought into an understanding of some of these marvelous truths. We thank Thee most of all for the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who very God of very God and very man of very man gave himself as a sacrifice, well-pleasing to Thee, and sufficient for the sins of sinners.

And we thank Thee for the work of the Holy Spirit in the bringing us to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal. Surely, O God, we are most blessed of all peoples.

And we thank Thee for the way in which Thou has made provision for us as children of God. We thank Thee for the privilege of petition, the privilege of bringing our requests to Thee and knowing that Thou dost hear them. And we thank Thee for the marvelous way in which Thou hast answered so many of them. And Lord, today as we think of the needs of our day, the needs of this country, the need of the church, the body of Christ, the need of our Christian friends, the needs of the Chapel, we are so grateful that we may confidently bring them all to Thee.

“Transcendent Love or the Return of the Adulteress” by S. Lewis Johnson
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And Lord, we pray for our country, for our President, for those in authority. May O God by Thy marvelous grace they be preserved and given the ability and wisdom and skill to govern in a way that will be pleasing to Thee and useful and fruitful for us.

We pray even more earnestly for the church, the body of Christ and for all believers, all true believers who have been, by Thy grace, brought to rest in the blood that was shed on Calvary’s cross for the forgiveness of their sins, personally. Lord, we bring them all to Thee.

We pray that we may grow in grace and the knowledge of Christ. We look forward to the future when we shall be unified in so many ways in the knowledge of our God. And then Lord, we remember those in our calendar of concern. We pray Thy blessing upon each one of them and may the needs that are expressed in our calendar be before Thee and receive the ministration from Thee that is most fruitful and profitable for them.

We thank Thee for this assembly of believers, for its elders and deacons and friends. We pray Thy blessing upon each one and upon the outreach of the Chapel. May these days in which we live we have a significant relationship to the world around us. We commit ourselves to Thee. We thank Thee and praise Thee for the privilege of gathering on a beautiful day like this, to listen to divine truth.

And now Lord, may Thy blessing be upon the singing of our hymns. May they redound to the glory of Thy name and upon the ministry that follows. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

[Message] Hosea was a prophet of God who was called to love a woman who would prove unfaithful to him, and Hosea in his story, as he tells it in the third chapter, has done just that. She has done just that, too. And so the result was that there was a marriage and then a separation, and now in this chapter, the prophet is telling us about a reconciliation that has been arranged by the Lord God.

One might ask the question, why is the prophet asked by God to marry someone who was, or at least possessed, a harlot kind of nature? And of course, the reason is that what we have in Hosea is prophetic pedagogy. It was designed to symbolize Yahweh’s relationship to Israel. And Israel is the harlot and the adulterer, and Hosea himself is the Lord God, and Gomer is representative of Israel; Hosea, of the Lord God. And this prophetic pedagogy is designed to teach a spiritual lesson.

George L. Robinson who wrote a book on the Minor Prophets, said, “In all the world’s literature, there is no record of human love like that of Hosea.” And because there is nothing quite like this, it gave Hosea the ability to convey the anguish of a rejected God in a most unparalleled way.

Someone has said – I’ve forgotten whether it was Dr. Robinson himself – that Hosea is the Minnesinger among the prophets. The Minnesingers were the German lyric poets of the 12th through the 14th Centuries, who like minstrels went about singing of *die Minne*, which is an old German poetic word for love. And so Hosea is a kind of Minnesinger among the prophets. He’s a prophet of unconditional love.

Now he has been told to marry Gomer who was a woman a harlot nature. And the result has been that he has carried out his marriage, and she has left him. And now, chapter three records the command to love Gomer again. Go, again, love a woman who is loved by her husband and is, or by her paramour, and is an adulteress.

As you have probably noticed, this is a very short chapter. Perhaps some of you were happy it was a very short chapter, but at any rate, it’s a chapter of five verses. If you will take your Bible and count the words in Hosea chapter 3, you’ll find that there are probably less than 100 words. In the Hebrew text, there are exactly eighty-one words for chapter 3. But these eighty-one words form a kind of *multum in parvo* – a much in little – for they picture for us the complete picture of Israel’s national history. Israel’s past, Israel’s present, and they give us also a foreview of Israel’s future.

So let’s look at it with that in mind. And we’ll look first at the Lord’s proscription, his command, Israel’s past in verse 1, and then the prophet’s purchase of Gomer which has to do with Israel’s present in verse 2, 3, and 4, and finally the prophet’s prophecy, or Israel’s future, in verse 5. It’s a very simple little story, but it’s very full of significance. And as we’ll see, I hope, it has tremendous application to us today.

Hosea returns now in chapter 3 to the individual, personal relationship that was set up in chapter 1 after the words of chapter 2 which have to do, primarily, with the Lord’s relationship to the nation as a whole. When he says, “Again love a woman who is loved by her paramour and is an adulteress,” while he doesn’t name her and call her Gomer, it’s likely that it is a reference to Gomer, so she is the one who is in view. Love the woman who is loved by a paramour and commits adultery.

This word, translated “husband” in the New American Standard Bible, I think, as I mentioned in this Scripture reading, is better rendered by the word “paramour,” for the relationship is to an illicit companion. And the Hebrew expression, *rea’*, is an expression that in, for example, in Jeremiah 3 verse 1 and also in the Song of Solomon refers to an illicit lover. In this context, it seems to me that that is the point.

But now more important than that are the words that follow. “Even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.” Now you can see in the beginning of this chapter, the prophet is speaking about unconditional love. He says, again love a woman who is loved by her paramour and is an adulteress, even as the Lord loves the sons of Israel.

Now, the love of the Lord for the sons of Israel is an unconditional love. One only has to begin reading the Old Testament to see that, because in the beginning of Genesis chapter 12, Abram is given some magnificent promises. They include promises such as, “I will make your name great,” “I will give you a land,” and particularly, “In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

Now one does not find and condition given there. God just reveals himself to Abram, and announces to him these promises. They are unconditional promises. If there’s any question about them being unconditional promises, one only has to turn to the 15th chapter of Genesis, where Abram has these promises confirmed to him in a sacrificial act. And you’ll remember that Abram is told to bring certain animals, to cut the animals in two, put half of the animal over here and the other half over here, and then also some birds which evidently he divided, putting one on one side and one on the other. And then Abram waited. He waited for a lengthy period of time. The birds of heaven come down to prey upon the animal pieces but are driven away, perhaps illustrative of Satanic desire to thwart what is to take place.

But ultimately, as the sun is going down, and Abram has been waiting for hours, in the dusk of the evening he sees a furnace and a smoking pot approaching the animal sacrifice. Of course, that is designed to represent the Lord God, for he is the pillar of fire, seen as a pillar of fire at night and as a pillar of cloud in the day that guided Israel later through to the Promised Land. But as the furnace and the smoking pot approached the pieces of the animals, a strange thing takes place, because, you see, that was the way that people cut a covenant. That’s the way the Hebrews expressed the making of a covenant: cut a covenant. And as the animals were cut in half – Jeremiah refers to this practice – this was to them the making of a covenant.

And ordinarily, people who entered into a conditional covenant, both would pass between the pieces, signifying that they would give themselves to death to keep the stipulations of the covenant. But in this case, it is that which is symbolic of the presence of the Lord God – the smoking pot and the furnace – it passes between the pieces and Abraham is not invited to follow. In fact, Abraham is the astonished spectator of what is transpiring. In other words, the Lord God is pledging his own honor, his own nature, his own fidelity to the keeping of the promises that he has made to Abraham. That is what we mean when we say a covenant is an unconditional covenant.

Now, I know that someone will say, “But God does not give his promises to impenitent people, does he?” No, God does not give his promises to impenitent people as a general rule. He gives his promises to penitent people. Well, then, is not the penitence or the faith a condition? Well, it may be a condition in the sense that God gives his promises to a believing people, but you see, what happens is that by virtue of our Lord Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, he has not only won for us, the people of God, the forgiveness of our sins in the blood that was shed, but he has also won for us the faith by which we lay hold of the promises of God. So, in one sense we can say, faith is the condition, but once we have said that, we should not put a period there. We should go on to say, and God has pledged himself to give the faith by which they shall come to the possession of the promises.

That, of course, is why God speaks and says, “The time is going to come when Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king, and they will come trembling to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days, because he has determined unconditionally that that will happen. He will give them the faith by which they will receive the unconditional promises of God. That’s what we mean when we say that Abram’s love which God has for him is unconditional, and why Hosea and his relationship to Gomer is designed to represent the unconditional love of God. It is even as the Lord God loves the sons of Israel.

Now a few pages on in your Bible, in the prophecy of Amos, in the third chapter of this prophecy, the prophet writes, “Hear the word which the Lord has spoken against you, sons of Israel, against the entire family which he brought up from the land of Egypt. You only have me among all the families of the earth.” Now in the Hebrew text that reads, “You only have I known among the families of the earth. Therefore, I will punish you for all your iniquities.” Notice the expression, “You only have I known among all the families of the earth.” That is an expression of the unconditional love of God. God knew

all of the families of the earth, but in this special sense of his distinguishing love, he has known only Israel.

And of course, as the program of God develops, and it becomes evident that the Gentiles are introduced into the enjoyment of the blessings of the Abrahamic promises, it can be said of us as well that we have been loved unconditionally by the Lord God. So, Israel is my son, my only begotten. So, the prophet writes, “Love her and the LORD God loves the sons of Israel.” In spite of much rebellion, they are his, and they will always be his.

Now, look again at the conclusion of verse 1. We read here, “Though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.” Now isn’t that strange? Four times in this opening verse we have the term, love. Love a woman who’s loved by her paramour; as the Lord loves the sons of Israel, though they turn to other gods and *love* raisin cakes. So, four times the relationships are spoken of in terms of love.

Now, notice how it ends, though, in what someone has called, utter bathos. For God loving Israel to the uttermost, while Israel gives her heart to raisin cakes. Think of it, God loves Israel unconditionally, eternally, and Israel loves raisin cakes. Isn’t it striking? God with unconditional, eternal love – for his love must be eternal; he’s eternal – he loves Israel eternally. That’s why when he sets his love upon someone, he means they are chosen, they shall be redeemed, they shall be kept forever. But Israel loves raisin cakes. The incongruity of it is outrageous. The Lord God loves Israel, but Israel like the raisin cakes.

Derek Kidner has written a helpful little book on the prophecy of Hosea. And he comments upon one of C.S. Lewis’ books. In fact, the book is really responsible for Lewis bursting upon the Christian scene in 1941. He wrote a clever little satire called *Screwtape Letters* which were instructions from a senior devil to a junior devil on how to snatch a new Christian from the snares of heaven.

“Screwtape,” Mr. Kidner says, “we may suppose would have hailed this as an unusually satisfying victory for his department, for a victory it would still have been even if the bait had to be the world itself, because if we gain the whole world, what have we gained? Nothing, if we have lost our own souls.” Nothing. So, and then he quotes Screwtape, “An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the proper formula,” as he gives his instructions to his secondary demon, or his lower-class demon.

So, and ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure. “It’s more certain,” Screwtape tells his underling, “it’s better styled, too. To get a man’s soul and give him nothing in return, ah,” he said, “that’s what really gladdens our father’s heart.” And of course, “our father” is Satan himself. So if we can get a person’s whole heart and give him absolutely nothing, that’s what makes Satan happy. That’s what gladdens our father’s heart, so Screwtape says.

Now, we’re inclined to look at this, and we’re inclined to say, “Well, that couldn’t be us.” But think about it just a moment. Think about all the trivialities for which we go. Think about the frivolities in which we engage ourselves. Well, when one thinks about the things we’re involved in, the things we chase, the things we run after, ah one can see that Hosea’s words to Israel are words that are really addressed ultimately to us as well. God loves the people of God, those upon whom he has set his eternal love, and they are loving raisin cakes. So, the people of God are going after fame, money, trivialities, pleasure – shows, the theater, games, sports. All of these trivialities, all of these frivolities are taking the place of responsiveness to the Lord God. There’s hardly any one of us who could not look at our lives and find a half-a-dozen things which would classify as raisin cakes.

The Lord God has set his love upon us, given himself to us, given himself to us unconditionally, is loving us forever with the blessings of the eternal God, including heaven and all of the other things lasting throughout all eternity, and the things that occupy our hearts are the frivolities of raisin cakes. It is outrageous.

What shall a man give in exchange for his whole soul? Suppose he gains the whole world, what has he got? Ah, he’s spent his time in getting nothing. That does make Screwtape’s father happy. And it makes our Father angry. Well, I cannot – I just pass by that and say it’s amazing, the Lord God loves the sons of Israel; they love raising cakes.

Now the prophet is told to make a purchase. We read, “So I bought her for myself with fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a half of barley.” Now if you turn to the Old Testament in Exodus chapter 21 and verse 32, we read this in the Mosaic law, “If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall give his or her master 30 shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.” In other words, the live of a slave – male or female – was worth 30 shekels of silver. So we read here that Hosea bought Gomer back for himself for fifteen shekels of silver – that’s only half the price of a slave – and a homer and a half of barley.

Now exactly what that meant we don’t know. It’s possible it meant about 15 shekels, so about 30 shekels, about the price of a slave. It’s possible even that it was a little bit less, because barley was the cheapest of grains. And so, the evaluation that is placed upon Gomer is the evaluation of a slave. Practically worthless in the life of that time. That, you see, is the way in which we are really valued in ourselves before the Lord God, for we are lost and undone, and we are under divine guilt and condemnation, and headed for a Christless eternity as individuals until God seeks us out in his grace and brings us to himself.

Today, we hear people speak about the dignity of man. There is no dignity for men in their sin. Or someone might say, we are valuable to God; well, we are valuable to God, not because of what we are in ourselves, but because of what he will make of us by his grace. And so Gomer is worth the price of a slave or less.

Now we read that Hosea is told to say to her, “I said to her, you shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man, so I will also be

toward you.” What an anomalous relationship. A man and a wife brought together in marriage, but no intercourse is to take place. She is no longer to be the consort of her paramours, but as she’s now brought into the household of Hosea, she’s to have no intercourse with him, and he is to have no intercourse with her. This is discipline for a sexually consumed person such as Gomer.

So here, for many days she is exposed to discipline. You can see from this that God is not interested, transferring the illustration to reality, God is not interested in punishment. He’s not interested in mere possession. But he’s interested in response. He would like to see Israel respond to his love and to his concern, and also to his discipline.

Now he explains in the fourth verse what is involved in this. “For the sons of Israel will remain for many days” – notice the expression, many days, which occurs in verse 3 and verse 4. And this expression, *yowmim rabin* in the Hebrew text is repeated in the two verses. So, just as Hosea is to live with Gomer for many days in this strange relationship, so the sons of Israel are to remain for many days without a king or a prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols.

This is a telling picture of the Nation Israel today. When Jesus Christ was here, and he gave his ministry to the nation, that generation of the nation on the earth at that time, and they failed to respond, the climax of their failure to respond was reached when they said, “We have no king but Caesar.” And when they said they had no king but Caesar, they were denying their theocratic relationship before the Lord God, and in denying their theocratic relationship before the Lord God, they acknowledged the breaking of the relationship of the Lord God with that generation of Israel on the earth at that time. But the breaking of the relationship to the nation as a whole cannot be broken.

So, for many days they will abide without king or prince, without sacred pillar, without ephod or household idols. Notice the three missing things: governmental or civil polity. Israel will not have a king and they will not have a prince. And since the days of Zedekiah, they have had no king in their midst. The Hasmonean dynasty has no parallel.

And after Zerubbabel and the Messiah, they have no prince. Characteristic of the Old Testament is the prophecy of Isaiah who says in chapter 53 and verse 8 that the Messianic king is to be cut off. And Daniel also in chapter 9 of his prophecy says the same thing, that the Messiah is to be cut off. And so, Israel today has no king and they have no prince, and they will not have until our Lord comes again.

There is a saying among the Jewish people, “No one of our nation has been able to gather us together or become our king since those days.” So, Israel abides today without a king and without a prince. God fulfills the prophetic word as written. Not of course as we interpret it; I hope we interpret accurately. But he fulfills the prophetic word as written.

Further, he says, not only will they abide many days without king or prince, but without sacrifice or sacred pillar. These are references to spiritual worship, and Israel is unable to have spiritual worship according to the law of God, because the temple is not there and the land is not completely theirs. In fact, the one crucial place in the land is not theirs. Right in the center of Jerusalem they do not have ultimate control.

There is no priesthood to carry out their sacrifices because there are no genealogies by which the proper line of Levi could be established. In fact, the only person who has right to the title of High Priest in Israel today, High Priest after the Order of Melchizedek, is our Lord Jesus Christ himself. And in fact, there is no one who has title to king except our Lord Jesus Christ himself. And he has two beautiful genealogical patterns, in Matthew and in Luke which establish his right to rule upon the Davidic throne, and only he has the right, for he had no successors.

So, no king or prince, no sacrifice or sacred pillar. In fact, no sacrifice because the once and for all sacrifice has been offered, and so all down through the years Israel has been unable to keep the law which they say is valid for them. Isn’t it striking? Every time the Passover service is observed today it’s observed falsely in Israel. It can never be observed according to Scripture. In fact, the lambs are not slain. They’re not slain at the

proper place. There’s no valid observance of the Passover today. It is impossible for them to observe the Passover properly, and if you know anything about Judaism and its theology, the only way in which they can explain that is to say, “We sacrifice as if we were in authority in the land.” And so their theology is an “as if” theology, not the theology of reality, for God has shut the door on the observance of the Mosaic law according to the Old Testament teaching.

And finally he says, “without ephod or household idols.” That is, not only will they not have proper civil polity; not only will they not have spiritual worship for these many days, because the once and for all offering of our Lord Jesus Christ has been made, but they will also not observe idolatry. And it’s one of the characteristic things of Judaism that they are not idolaters today. If God has taught them anything by their captivity, it is there is no reality to idolatry. And so in Israel, there is no idolatry. There is no true, and there is no false worship.

But true to her history since the captivity, she still abides. She’s still with us today. That’s a stubborn fact that we cannot escape. Israel is still with us today. Many people would like to escape that fact – some Jewish – but Israel today abides.

One of the false prophets of the Old Testament, Balaam by name, made a significant series of Messianic prophecies – four of them in fact. And in one of them, in Numbers chapter 23, he said this, “How shall I curse whom God has not cursed? How shall I denounce whom the Lord has not denounced? As I see him (and he’s looking out over the valley where Israel has gathered) from the top of the rocks, and I look at him from the hills, behold, a people who dwells apart -- *a people who dwells apart* -- and shall not be reckoned among the nations.”

And so the Nation Israel is separate. It is always separate. It will always be separate. It is a people that dwells alone, and she is not reckoned among the Gentiles. And to this day, it is true. Today we have an Israel, but we have Israelites all over the world, and they dwell alone. It is obvious.

One of the reasons that Gentiles are guilt often of anti-Semitism is ultimately a rejection of the doctrine of sovereign grace. Because fundamental in the human nature since the time of the choice of Abraham is a conviction, a lurking conviction that God in sovereign grace chose Abraham and determined to bless Abraham and his seed. And since we’re opposed to sovereign grace naturally, we’re all born legalists and Pharisees, and when we’re converted we’re Arminians, and it’s the work of sanctification to bring us to sovereign grace, and we all shall come. But characteristic of human nature is trust in ourselves, as so we don’t like the idea that the sovereign God has put his hand upon a certain person and his descendants. And so, anti-Semitism is ultimately – this is my own analysis; it’s not inspired (I didn’t have to tell you that) – it’s my analysis that anti-Semitism is ultimately an attack on the sovereign elective purpose of God. But the Scriptures say that Israel is going to abide, and she will abide.

Hegel, the German philosopher, on Israel’s history said, “It’s a dark, troublesome enigma to me.” And you know, when a German philosopher says that something is an enigma to him, it must be an enigma, because they usually have a word on everything [laughter]. One might also point out here that this verse marks, or gives the lie squarely to all such strange teachings as the one labeled Anglo-Israelism, as if, for example, Israel is not to be found in England and the United States. Ah the foolish things for which men go in order to avoid the teaching of the word of God that Israel shall abide. They are the object of the eternal, distinguishing love of God.

And now finally the prophet concludes with the prophecy of the 5th verse, “Afterward” – yes, the many days do have an afterward – afterward, after these many days of divine discipline in which Israel is sent to the four corners of the earth, in which they have no spiritual worship, in which they have no civil polity, no government, in which they are without idolatry but they are not worshipping the true God, “Afterward, the sons of Israel will return and seek the Lord their God, (or Yahweh their God) and David their king, and the will come trembling to Yahweh and to his goodness in the last days.”

Yes, there is an afterward. The many days will come to an end, and then the Lord God will bring it about that Israel returns to him. This term, “in the last days” is one that refers to the Messianic days by usage in the Old Testament. But I’d like you to notice the three acts that are attributed to the nation. They will return, they will seek the Lord their God and David their king, and they will come trembling to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days.

Now if you read the prophecy of Hosea and I hope you are reading it as we are attempting to expound it, you’ll notice how often the prophet uses the term, turn or return. It’s one of the basic theological terms of this book. Return unto me. Well, they have not returned unto me, but here it is stated that they will return, they will seek the Lord their God, and they will come with trembling. Now that’s a strange thing, isn’t it?

You know, I so often say to you, we cannot come to the Lord God of ourselves. In other words, there is no one that seeks after God, so Paul says. There is none that seeketh after God, no not one. Is that different kind of teaching from the Old Testament? Did Paul look back on the Old Testament and get his theology from Genesis and then find that everybody else had a different kind of theology? That Paul believed in sovereign grace, and James and the other New Testament writers believed in mixing works with grace? No, we wouldn’t believe anything like that. We would believe the same Spirit that taught James and Peter taught the Apostle Paul, and the same Spirit that taught the apostles taught the prophets as well.

Well that’s what we find. For in the 5th chapter in the 4th verse we read, “Their deeds will not allow them to return to their God.” In other words, it was impossible for Israel to return to the Lord God. The Prophet Hosea speaks of the inability of man just as Paul. And the fact that this is so is evident when we read Romans and find that Paul in Romans’ greatest exposition of grace relies heavily upon the teaching of the Book of Hosea. So, their deeds will not allow them to return to their God. They cannot return to the Lord God, but they will return to the Lord God.

So what we can say about human inability? When we say that men are unable to come to God, we mean that men are unable to come to God of themselves. They are unable to come to God without divine enablement. That’s what we mean by inability. But when a man throws himself upon the grace of God, he is brought by divine ability to the Lord God, and so Hosea the Prophet is simply saying that the day is coming when Israel, having been disciplined for centuries, and in their inability when they cannot come to God, the day will come when by divine ability they will turn to the Lord God. They will seek him out and they will come trembling before him, and they will utter to him the thing that is described in chapter 2 and verse 23; they will say, “Thou art my God.”

O wandering, pathetic Israelite, for centuries seeking after reality and not finding it because your back is turned to the Lord God. The day is coming when you will come to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel. You’ll come trembling to him and you will say, “Thou art my God.” I look forward to that day. It makes chills run up and down my back to think of that day when Israel, after years of wandering under the discipline of God shall be brought to the confession of the distinguishing grace of God that has marked them out from the beginning as a people that dwell alone for the reception of the blessings of the eternal God.

And to think that he has allowed us Gentiles by his grace to enter into the blessings of Abraham, that’s enough to touch any true Christian’s heart.

So, they will seek him. They will return. And they will come trembling to the Lord their God. It’s not a new story. This is something that is told all through the Bible. Back in the Book of Deuteronomy, back in chapter 4, these prophets were students of the Old Testament, and back in chapter 4 and verse 27 and following, this is what we read,

“The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But

from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in tribulation (that word, distress, is the word for tribulation) and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them.”

It’s covenantal love, and God does not forget that covenant.

And so, Hosea’s prophecy makes good sense to me. The day is coming when the sons of Israel will return by the grace of God. They will seek Yahweh, the God of the covenant, their God, and David their king – incidentally, the Jewish Targum at this point adds the statement, “this is the king, Messiah” – and David their king, and they will come trembling to the covenantal God, Yahweh, and to his goodness in the latter days. Civil polity, spiritual worship, all regained in the worship of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Well for the saints here, what a magnificent theology of forgiveness. It is initiated by God. It is consummated by God. It is often in the midst of suffering and has the result of divine discipline, and may God so move in our hearts that we come trembling out of admiration for the love that he has shown in the sacrifice of Christ, out of adoration, because he has loved us, and out of aspiration. Lord, I would serve Thee.

Do you have that aspiration? Lord, I would serve Thee who has loved me so much. And remember, it may be that we must pass through some experiences like Job did. The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord. But he loves eternally in his grace.

And then for those of you who are here this morning, you may think by accident, but not by accident, for there are no accidents in God’s world. For those of you who are here and you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you may be an enemy of the Lord God. You may have been careless, though you have abided under his providential

goodness for all of these days. You may be a very prosperous person, but you do not realize that your prosperity comes ultimately from the Lord God.

You’re like those animals that Isaiah writes about in the first prophecy of his book when he says in verse 3, “The ox knows its owner, the donkey its master’s manger, but Israel does not know. My people do not understand.” May God help you to realize that he has preserved your life to this very day so that you may realize that he has offered his body a sacrifice for sinners, and is sufficient for your sins as well as the sins of the world, and you may come and receive as a free gift, eternal life if brought to the sense of need.

May God enable you to come. May you say, Good Shepherd, carry me in your bosom like you carry your lambs. Mark me with the red mark of your blood shed on Calvary’s cross and take me into your flock. May God help you in his grace to come to him. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are so thankful to Thee for these magnificent prophecies from the word of God. We know, Lord, Thou art faithful to Thy word. And if there should be some here who have never believed in Christ, may they at this very moment lift a few words in prayer to Thee, “Good Shepherd, take me into your flock now and forever.”

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.