



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 6:1-11

“God Dismayed”

TRANSCRIPT

For those of you who have been with us in our consecutive expositions of the word of God, we are in the 6th chapter of the prophecy of Hosea. So will you take your Bibles and turn with me now to Hosea chapter 6, and I am going to read the eleven verses of this chapter.

The last clause of the 6th chapter we will reserve for discussion on the next Lord's Day, Lord-willing, because it really belongs to the next chapter in thought. Beginning with verse 1, the prophet writes,

“Come, let us return to the LORD
For He has torn us, but He will heal us;
He has wounded us, but He will bandage us.
"He will revive us after two days;
He will raise us up on the third day,
That we may live before Him.”

(If you'll suffer just a comment on this second verse. When he says “he will raise us up on the third day,” that is interesting for this reason. As you know, the Apostle Paul in 1

Corinthians 15 is that the gospel is that Christ died, that he was buried, that he rose again on the third day, and that he has appeared to a number of individuals. Bible students have searched the Scriptures of the Old Testament, for they were the Scriptures that Paul probably referred to there, and have found no clear indication that Jesus would rise on the third day, or that the Messiah would rise on the third day.

So, Hosea chapter 6 and verse 2 has been thought to be perhaps the only suggestion of that, and then of course in a typical way. It’s possible, not likely, that the apostle was referring to some parts of the New Testament, but since in 1 Corinthians what he wrote is probably one of the earliest New Testament writings, that seems more doubtful. It may be that this is the reference the apostle had in mind, and it’s interesting from that standpoint. In the message, I’m not going to say anything about it, so we will pass it with just that comment. (The third verse continues,)

"So let us know, let us press on to know the LORD
His going forth is as certain as the dawn;
And He will come to us like the rain,
Like the spring rain watering the earth."
What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?
What shall I do with you, O Judah?
For your loyalty (that’s the familiar word, lovingkindness, or “loyal love;”
remember, we’ve said as the Scots say, “*leel* love”) For your loyalty is like a morning cloud
And like the dew which goes away early.
Therefore I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets;
I have slain them by the words of My mouth;
And the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth.
For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice,
And in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant;
There they have dealt treacherously against Me.”

(Some of you may have a version in which there’s a slightly different rendering of verse 7; contemporary Hebrew scholarship has generally said that we should take “like Adam” as “at Adam,” by a slight change of the text that we have. Adam is the name of a town mentioned once in the Old Testament, and since there “they have dealt treacherously against me” is stated in the next clause, it might appear that the prophet is referring to a place rather than a person. And so, they have tended to render this “at Adam” they have transgressed the covenant. What they did we don’t know except simply that it was a case of breaking the Mosaic commandment.

But if this is the reference to Adam as the text taken as we have it suggests, then of course it would be a reference to the Edenic Covenant made by God with Adam, and a reference then to the Fall in the Garden of Eden. And he would be suggesting that Israel has in a sense replayed the Fall in their breaking of the Mosaic Covenant. I tend to take it that way myself. No great doctrine hinges upon it, but the sense of this passage does.)

“But like Adam they have transgressed the covenant;
There (would be something like “in that way”) they have dealt treacherously
against Me.”

Gilead is a city of wrongdoers,
Tracked with bloody footprints.
And as raiders wait for a man,
So a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem;
Surely they have committed crime.
In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing;

Ephraim's harlotry is there (that of course would be a reference to their worshipping of the false gods, the baals), Ephraim's harlotry is there

Israel has defiled itself.

Also, O Judah, there is a harvest appointed for you,

When I restore the fortunes of My people.”

May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are so grateful to Thee that we are able today to approach Thee through the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to know that Thou dost hear our petitions. We thank Thee for that marvelous truth; there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. And we thank Thee that this one mediator has affirmed I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father except by me. I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life. And, I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. O God, how wonderful to know by Thy marvelous grace manifested to us in the working of the Holy Spirit, that we have become a member of the family of God, the sheep have come home.

We are so grateful, and we thank Thee this Lord’s Day for the privilege of worshipping Thee, gathering like this, receiving ministry from the word of God and from our fellow believers as we converse with the things that have to do with Christ.

Lord, we pray Thy blessing upon this country, upon our President and upon those who are associated with him in the government. We ask for wisdom to be given to the American people this year as they select a new President.

And Father, we also ask that Thy blessing may rest upon the whole body of Christ wherever they may be and whatever individual church. May those true believers in our Lord Jesus be strengthened today and encouraged and comforted where comfort is

necessary. And may the whole body be built up into the perfect man, the mature man, the goal of our sovereign God.

We pray for the elders and deacons of Believers Chapel, for the members and friends and the visitors who are here in the midst of our meeting. O God, perform all of Thy good work in the lives of each one of them. We pray for the ministries of this work. The radio ministry in many places; O God, may Thy blessing be upon it. The publications ministries, the Bible classes. All of those means of outreach. O Father, we are grateful for the past. We pray that in the future, if it should be Thy will, we may continue to have the blessing of God upon us.

And especially we pray for those listed in our calendar of concern who need physical healing. We pray Lord, for them. We ask that Thou wilt glorify Thy name by providing for them just that which is most suitable for them, both for now and for eternity. Give wisdom and guidance for the doctors who minister to them. Give encouragement to the families and loved ones involved. And may we have reason to praise Thee for all that Thou dost do.

Be with us throughout this hour as we sing, as we listen to the Scriptures. May we leave having grown in the knowledge of our Lord as Hosea exhorted Israel so many centuries ago.

For Jesus’ sake we pray. Amen.

[Message] It’s so nice for us to have a man like Merle Weaver, who is available for service in our congregation. As many of you know, he is an ordained Methodist minister and was converted after his ordination, contrary to the customary practice, has come to know the Lord, and has been a great blessing to us. And one week he makes the announcements; the next week he leads the singing. It’s so nice to have someone like him around. We are grateful, Merle, for your help for us and to us.

The subject for today as we turn again to the prophecy of Hosea is “God Dismayed.” Hosea, we have been saying, is the prophet of unconditional love. And in

chapter 6, he portrays the struggle of God for the soul of the nation and its peoples. And there are some very striking lessons that one sees here, and the first of these, at least to me, is the fact that the way of blessing is often through disciplinary judgment. And one senses that as he reads verses 4 and 5, God is speaking through the prophet and in the light of the condition of Israel he says, “What shall I do with you O Ephraim; what shall I do with you O Judah, for your loyalty is like a morning cloud and like the dew that goes away early. Therefore, I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth.”

In other words, God often finds it necessary to deal with us in disciplinary judgment, because we have not responded to the ministry of the truth as we should have. And one senses in this 4th and 5th verses particularly the stress that God puts on the broken promises of the people of God, or those who profess that they know him – those speedy promises that we often utter without thinking, that we will follow God. Or while we’re listening to the word of God, when we are reflecting upon spiritual things, we often make promises, well, that he says in chapter 6 here, are like a morning cloud, like the dew which goes away early.

I have to get up on Sunday morning rather early in order to be here for the 8:30 service, and this morning I went out and there was the dew on the grass, but when I go home, the dew will be gone. And often you awaken in the morning the clouds are in the sky, but at noon the clouds are gone. And particularly was this true in the land of Palestine, and God was using these common figures to lay stress upon the fact that our speedy promises that we will serve him and love him completely are promises that are just like the dew in the morning. They’re there for a brief time, but then they’re gone.

Those striking promises, those unusual promises that we make and sometimes that we repeat over and over again. Mr. Spurgeon commenting upon this likens this to a stone mason and says, “Suppose a stone mason should labor all day long, chipping away at his stone in order to make his figure, and then the next morning should wake up the

next morning and find that the stone had grown back to what it was the day before?” Or if you were a man whose business was to go into the forest and cut down trees. Suppose that the next day after you had cut down a number of trees you had found the trees had grown up again the next morning? So, our speedy, striking, repeated, but really empty and broken promises ultimately may lead to the disciplinary judgment of God. And in the devices of divine mercy, sometimes it’s necessary for divine mercy to expose us to the cuttings of Providence, those cutting operations that even touch the inmost beings of our souls.

One of the great truths of the Bible is that God has his elect people, his elect nation, and he will bless them ultimately in the future. Generations have passed, generations of disobedient ones, and Hosea was ministering to a generation that was making promises. Day after day they would speak about how they would serve the Lord God. They were acting out their religion, but there was nothing really there.

And finally, in the day of our Lord, the generation there crucified the Messiah and were scattered to the four corners of the earth. And now God has been working among the Gentiles, and vast numbers of the Gentiles have crowded in to receive the blessings of the Abrahamic promises, for we who believe in Christ are said in the New Testament to be the seed of Abraham.

And so we find ourselves doing much the same thing. We are in days of apostasy and backsliding in many cases, but we are making great promises. And we’re attending our meetings, and even sometimes more than one meeting a week. But in our hearts, well, it’s like the morning cloud, our lovingkindness, our loyalty. We express it often, but then when the Sun comes up it goes. And so God, occasionally, as he will do with the Nation Israel and as he often has to do with us, he has to expose us to experiences that are not very pleasant in themselves in order that we may be brought to him.

Mr. Spurgeon, also commenting upon the third verse here speaks about the fact that some people are so fearful, overloaded with fear, that they fail to hope in his mercy.

And he said, just a few days before he had spoken with a man who had said to him, “Sir, I am spiritually dead.” And Mr. Spurgeon said, “I answered, ‘Jesus says he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.’ And he replied he was without hope, and I reminded him that one time we also were without Christ and without hope, and yet we were made nigh through the blood of Christ. ‘Alas,’ he said, ‘I have no strength for anything.’ I bade him remember that it is written, when we were yet without strength, in due time, Christ died for the ungodly. ‘O sir, you are very skillful at turning things about, but I am lost.’ Yes, I said, but the Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which is lost.”

He said, “If you were to describe yourself as a lovely gentleman, then of course I would find nothing in the Bible with which to comfort you. But the fact that you have used these black words and condemning words by which you’ve dogged yourself, I feel that you are Christ’s man, for you have described yourself just as the Scriptures described those who Jesus came to save.”

You see, the experiences of life are experiences that in themselves are often difficult, but they’re experiences that are designed by the Lord God to bring us to the knowledge of the Savior.

One thing we must learn when we read the Scriptures is that God is no Play-dough God. We give Play-dough to children. Sometimes they give them to boys and men in theological seminaries in order to draw certain lessons from them, but we make our little figures with our Play-dough, and that’s supposed to reveal something about us, you know. But God is no Play-dough God. He’s a God, who the Scripture says, is angry with sinners all day long. He hates all the workers of iniquity.

Sometimes in the 20th Century, we forget the texts of Scripture that we don’t like. We like to stress the love of God and the mercy of God, but we’re not students of the word of God as a whole, and so what we have is a one-sided picture of God. He cannot possibly be angry, because he loves everybody and he’s redeemed everybody, and in the

long run he’s going to save everybody including Satan himself, because you wouldn’t want to leave him out, would you, in this universalism we are supposed to believe in our day. And so, the world and the Christian world, unfortunately, adores a God who is made of putty or wax, plastic, effeminate, molluscos, with no masculine faculty about him, and no quality that entitles him to the respect of just and honest men. For a being who cannot be angry at wrong doing is destitute of one of the essential virtues.

A moral ruler who is not angry with the wicked and refuses to punish crime is not a divine being at all. We don’t in any way deny that God is a God of love. He is a God of love. But there is a vast difference between the benevolent love of God, which he has for all men, and the complacent love of God which he has for his elect people. It’s all the difference in the world. It’s expressed most vividly perhaps in the expression, “Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.”

It is also expressed in the fact that he has a special love for his sheep that is not the same as his love for others. And those who like to water down the love of God so that the love of God is the love of God for everyone do not know the difference between the love of the goats and the love of the sheep. And if we’re going to preach and teach the word of God, and if we’re going to preach in reality, we must careful to be true to his word. We’re not dealing, you know, with our property. The truth is God’s property. And he who takes someone else’ property is not being anything other than a spiritual thief, and we will not do that.

So, that’s one of the lessons that we must learn, that the way of blessing is often through disciplinary judgment, and often the experiences of life are the experiences by which we come to Christ.

I’ve been a Christian for a long time now, and it’s amazing how, as you go around the country, I speak in a lot of different churches. And I hear a lot of different testimonies of salvation. Many people will tell me that their experience of salvation came through some catastrophe that has come to them: a business failure, personal illness, illness of

some close and loved friend or family member. The disciplinary judgments of God by which he brings his people to himself are diverse, but for the love of the sheep, it is a sovereign, unchangeable love. And if we don’t recognize that, we shall never fully understand the Scriptures.

The other thing that is set forth here so beautifully in this wonderful statement in verse 6 is the uselessness of ritual without reality. For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. You know, it’s a striking thing to realize that Jesus Christ studied that text. I know he studied it, because he cites it in his dealings with the men of his day. He read this text as a man. He read it, pondered it, thought so much of it, agreed with it, that he cited it in his ministry. I delight in loyalty, he said of his Father, rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

O God, I want to say after I read these things, O God give me loyal love. Give me the kind of love that is not like a cloud that we see in the morning, but when noonday comes is gone. Give me a love not like the dew, which is there early in the morning but at noon, one can’t find it. Give me loyal love. Give me the kind of lovingkindness for the lord God that persists and perseveres.

Now the prophet in verse 1 through verse 3 makes a persuasive appeal. There are different ways in which you might take these first three verses. Some have taken them this way. Incidentally, you’ll notice in the New American Standard Bible translation which many of you are reading, these voices are in quotation marks. And the reason for that is that they are looked upon as being perhaps Israel’s own words, but a facile, presumptuous way of looking at spiritual life. “Come, let us return to the Lord, the people say, for he has torn us; he will heal us. He has wounded us; he will bandage us. He will revive us after two days.” In other words, it’s not a very serious thing at all. He’ll revive us after two days; he’ll raise us up on third day that we may live before him.” So

in other words, they’re making light of their desperate situation according to this interpretation.

That seems a little unlikely in the fact that in verse 15 of the preceding chapter, the prophet has just said, “I will go away and return to my place,” speaking for the Lord God, “Until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face in their affliction, in their tribulation, they will earnestly seek me.” So I think it is better to look at these verses as if the prophet speaks, but he’s giving the words that God wants people to say to him, the words that he wishes that this generation of Israel would utter to him. Come, let us return to the Lord, for he has torn us; he will heal us. He has wounded us; he will bandage us. In other words, he would love to see the nation itself speak to itself this way and return to him. So, let us know, let us press on to the Lord. And thus, the prophet gives words that God wants that he’s working for, but which the prophecy of Hosea will tell us will probably not come from this generation but will ultimately be evoked by God in the future.

You know, the prophets have this great view of the future, and many of them express the same thing. Listen to the Prophet Micah in the last three verses of his great prophecy. He says,

“Who is a God like Thee, who pardons iniquity
And passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession?
He does not retain His anger forever,
Because He delights in unchanging love (that’s the love of God for sheep).
He will again have compassion on us;
He will tread our iniquities under foot
Yes, Thou wilt cast all their sins
Into the depths of the sea.
You will give truth to Jacob

And unchanging love to Abraham (notice that, unchanging love),
Which You swore to our forefathers
From the days of old.”

He has not forgotten those ancient promises, and he will fulfill them. O the sufficiency of the sovereign grace of God for his people.

Now let me notice one or two little points here. Notice that this which the Lord would have the people say to him and about him includes these words. “Come, let us return to the Lord, for he has torn us, but he will heal us. He has wounded us, but he will bandage us.” In other words, they know that the one behind all of their experiences is the Lord God. This is what we call when we talk about the doctrine of God in the local seminary, this is what we mean when we talk about the providence of God. As Paul says, he works all things according to the counsel of his will, and therefore all of the experiences of our lives are experiences that pass through the sovereign will of God.

Perhaps the classic illustration of it is Joseph’s comment. Joseph, who was sold by his brethren into captivity, as he looks back over the past says, in Genesis chapter 50, “You. You meant it for evil, but God has meant it for good, to save much people alive today.” That’s the view of sovereign Providence, the view of unchanging love.

Just yesterday I was reading a Christian magazine, and amazing things are happening in our day. And some of the attacks upon traditional American values are positively astonishing. I cannot vouch for the absolute accuracy of this statement; I haven’t had time. I read it yesterday. But it appears in a respected Christian journal, a quotation from a professor of education at the graduate school of Harvard. He said recently, “Every child in America entering school at the age of five is mentally ill because he comes to school with certain allegiances to our Founding Fathers, toward our elected officials, toward his parents, toward a belief in a supernatural being, toward the sovereignty of this nation as a separate entity. It’s up to you teachers to make all of these

sick children well by creating the international children of the future.” Amazing statement, isn’t it? I’m going to write this magazine to check so that I may have the documentation accurately, but it’s reflective of course of the fact that what is happening in this country is an abandonment of some of the traditional values that are the product of Christianity.

I don’t know whether you’ve had a perfume bottle or not, but a perfume bottle, after you’ve already used all of the perfume, will have a nice smell about it for a long time. You can take the stopper out and smell it. There’s nothing in there, but the fumes. And what we are seeing the United States now is a country that is living off the fumes of Christianity. The reality is largely gone from the midst of our society, and so the encroachments have continued. And unfortunately, so far as I can tell, they will continue. How wonderful it is to come to the place when you realize there is this supernatural, sovereign being that he denigrates, and to realize that all of the experiences of life are under his hand, because there will ultimately be equity in mankind.

So, the day will come when Israel will say, “He has torn us, but he will heal us.” We were scattered to the four corners of the earth, but God did it. And he did it in order to bring us back to himself. He wounded us, but he will bandage us. He will revive us – you see, their condition is worse than just a little wound – so they go on to say, he will revive us after two days. He will raise us up on the third day. The facts are, they’re dead. That’s our natural condition: dead in trespasses and sins. And he will raise us up – that’s the radical cure that we need.

Now, this is very important for Hosea, “So let us press on to know the Lord.” In the Hebrew text that’s a very strong word. It means to pursue. Let us press on to know the Lord. In other words, more than national survival, it isn’t enough that Israel shall come to the knowledge of the Lord God in one great experience when the nation is converted as in a day. No. There is much more to the life of God than that.

When I was growing up in my Presbyterian Sunday school and studying the catechism, one of the things that we began with was, “What’s the chief end of man?” Well, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And the chief end of God is to enjoy him by the knowledge of God. It isn’t enough to come down in a meeting or raise one’s hand – those aren’t even Scriptural ways to express one’s faith. The way you express your faith scripturally is to request baptism by the elders. But nevertheless, you do not come to know God in the sense in which Hosea is speaking by some great act of faith produced by God. For you’re introduced to life, then. As a matter of fact, you’re a little child. And to know God is a life that continues.

It’s like marriage. In fact, Hosea’s whole book is built around the idea that to know God is to enter into a marriage relationship with him. And the relationship between Gomer, Hosea’s wife, and Hosea, is designed to picture the relationship between Israel and the Lord God. And all of us who have been married know that when we have entered into marriage, there is a sense in which we really come to know that person. But, ah, the years that follow, that knowledge increases, and it should increase. It should grow. It should expand. So that those who’ve been married a long time, they really know one another.

And when you come to know the Lord Jesus Christ, that’s the beginning of life. That’s the beginning of the knowledge of God. The ultimate aim of man is to know God, for to know him is to enjoy him, to love him. And also to love him perseveringly, too. So, it’s like a marriage. And he says, let’s know him; let’s press on to know him.

John Ruskin had a student who once went to Florence, Italy and went into a gallery, and Mr. Ruskin was, as you probably know, was a great student of Botticelli’s paintings. And this young student of his went into one of the galleries in Florence, and he came back to Mr. Ruskin and said, “When I went into that gallery and I saw one of those paintings of Botticelli, I knew exactly what you had been telling us about him, and how great a painter he really was.”

Ruskin was not impressed. He said, “It took me 22 years to know how great a painter Botticelli is. The idea that you could in a moment grasp all of the greatness that was this man was utterly impossible for Ruskin. And so likewise, the knowledge of God is not something that you come to know, and you know everything about the Lord God when you come to know that he is your Savior, having received him as your own personal Savior. That’s the beginning of life.

Now, the actual condition of course is that Israel does not love the Lord God. They’re in apostasy. They’re drifting away from him, but they’re still having the meetings. They didn’t have 11 o’clock services and 8:30 service. They had their temple and all of the services of the priesthood. And on the Day of Atonement they had certain particular types of ceremonies. And when they sinned they brought certain types of animals, and they had all of that magnificent Levitical liturgy. There has never been a liturgy more beautiful, sensibly, as the religion of Israel. Some churches have sought to duplicate it, but it’s impossible.

You could never have anything as magnificent as the Levitical ritual. And the priest, with his priestly garments, and the brazen altar of sacrifice, and the laver, and all of the furniture inside of the Tabernacle, and those elaborate services all set out in the word of God designed to reflect the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And then the feast days, and the Day of Atonement, the greatest day of the year when the priest changed his garments, and once and once only went into the Holiest of All, and offered the blood of the goat upon the Mercy Seat, and thus renewed the covenant for one more year – how could you have anything like that?

Christianity is so simple. We meet in the name of our Lord Jesus around the word of God. We observe the ordinances. We read and study the word of God. These are the things that make up Christianity, because we have the direct access to the Lord, because we’re all now, the Scriptures say, priests of God and able to approach him personally.

Well, in Israel, that had that lovely ritual. And they didn’t, I say, meet on Sunday morning at 8:30, and then at 11 and then Sunday night at 6:30. But they were constantly active about the Tabernacle. And God, of course, seeing this nation that’s like the morning cloud in their expressions of love, but when it comes right down to it don’t really have any love for him at all, he’s very disturbed because outwardly they are his people. It’s like God must be disturbed by the professing church of Jesus Christ. And so he says, “What shall I do for you O Ephraim? What shall I do with you O Judah?” We’re accustomed to hearing man say, what must I do to be saved? Like the Philippian jailer, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” But here God cries, what shall I do to save him?

What’s the problem? Their lovingkindness – that’s the problem. Their love. He says, for your loyalty, your lovingkindness is like a morning cloud, it’s like the dew which goes away early. Strange, isn’t it to say that the problem with you is your lovingkindness. You’d think maybe that’s a good thing. But the problem is your lovingkindness. Sure, you attend the 8:30 service in Believers Chapel, but what part does God have in your life the rest of the week? Oh yeah, sure, here at 11 o’clock. But what part does the truth have of God have in your life the rest of the week?

Is your lovingkindness like a cloud? It is like the dew? Does it last through Sunday morning? Does last on into Monday morning at 8:30 when you go down to the office? Or maybe for you ladies when you go to the grocery store, or whatever it is that you do on Monday.

It’s excellent, but it’s evanescent. It’s fine, but it’s fading. It’s valuable, but it’s vanishing. It’s only a show of piety. Why? Well, piety that is a result of superficial feeling is always unpersevering. Faith and feeling that are shallow and temporary, expressed in the word of God – the Lord Jesus told some beautiful parables, and one of them that I love is the parable of the soils, all of those different kinds of soils. They are so beautifully expressive of four types of people. And speaking of one of them, the Lord says, “And those on rocky soil are those who when they hear receive the word with joy,

and these have no firm root. They believe for a while, and in time of testing they fall away.” And the word for fall away is the word from which we get the English word, apostasy. So their kind of faith is no firm, saving faith.

That’s very true to life. There are people who are responsive to the word of God for a week or so, a month or so, a year or so. Having preached for about 40 years now, and having preached for most of that time regularly in Dallas, I can look out over that city and see of lots of people that I remember were very responsive for a time to the Scriptures. But you meet them today, they’re cold. Many of them are not only cold, but actually are rebellious to the faith, unresponsive totally. Because you see, if your response is merely emotional, it will be fading.

If you cannot have the sense of the knowledge of God grounded in the sovereign work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and if there has never come a time in your life when out of gratitude you have acknowledged your lost condition, and you have by God’s grace entrusted yourself to him, and having realized that your eternal salvation is dependent upon what he has accomplished, and you’re grateful for what he has done, your faith will be like the morning cloud, too. It will be like the dew.

If you have never been brought to the place where you can distinguish between his benevolent love for all and his complacent love for his elect, you have not come to understand the love of God, for you have identified the love of the goats with the love of the sheep, and the love of God for his sheep is unchangeable, sovereign, it never fails. And it will never fail those who have come to know him as his sheep.

Reciting the creeds, attending church, attending Believers Chapel where the word of God is proclaimed – sometimes that of course can become just a rote thing. Thomas Chalmers once said, “If God made the country and man made the city, the devil made the suburbs.” And from a religious standpoint there is some truth to that, because it’s in the suburbs that it’s so difficult for nice people – law and order people; I believe in that – but law and order people, people who are intelligent generally, but people who often

however, are self-satisfied spiritually. They go through the motions, and unfortunately, they never hear any challenges from the word of God because it’s shallow Christianity that they know. It’s not surprising that the down-and-outers are able to respond more significantly because they know they’re lost condition. But they don’t.

Now, as a result of this, the prophet, giving God’s word, says, “Therefore,” (here’s the paternal penalty; he hates to do this) What shall I do with you, Ephraim? What shall I do with you O Judah? But he will bring his people to himself. “Therefore, I have hewn them in pieces by the prophets. I have slain them with the word of my mouth, and the judgments on you are like the light that goes forth. He will minister to their condition, and he will seek to refashion them by the word of God through the prophets, and there was Elijah rising up through the prophecies that condemn the nation. And there is Micah, Isaiah, and there is Hosea – all of these were expressions of God for his people.

And out of these people were gathered a few here and there who formed the remnant. And his judgments were like a sharp sword. In fact, the Prophet Isaiah, referring to our Lord Jesus’ future ministry speaks of his words as “like a sharp sword.” Why? Well, he says, verse 6, for I delight in loyal love rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. The thing that he is interested in is not our outward service. He’s not interested in the fact that you attend church on Sunday as if that is the thing that satisfies him, if that is the extent of your expression of your deep devotion to him. Your kind of gratitude for what he has done with this unchangeable love, then this of course is pleasing to him.

But if this is your hope, if you rest upon this as the means by which in some way or another God is going to bless you, O how sadly mistaken you are if think that standing before the judgment seat of Christ or the Great White Throne Judgment you should say, “But I attended church every Sunday morning” and think that that will mean that you will be accepted by the eternal God, Oh how mistaken can you be?

Like Adam, they’ve transgressed the covenant. They’ve dealt treacherous against me. Then in these mention of the cities, these evidently were places where the baals were worshipped. The harlotry, spiritual harlotry that was taking place was taking place in some of these places. “Gilead is a city of wrongdoers, tracked with bloody footprints. And as raiders wait for a man, so a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem.”

James L. Mays, Professor of New Testament at Union Seminary in Richmond, says, “Verses 6 through 10 are a miniature guidebook to the geography of the sin of Israel.” And you can see in these in these various places where they were disobeying the Lord God.

But there is an interesting statement there about Shechem, because of course he’s obviously trying to criticize the nation, and so he says, “a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem.” So what is it about Shechem what was different? And the commentators of course do not know for certain, because we don’t have the historical information. But they rather surmise that at Shechem, individuals gathered who weren’t following the main trends of the nation. That is, the faithful were gathering there. And so, as they left and did not attend the places where the baals were worshipped, where the priests were supporting, the religious people were supporting, these people were slipping off so that they could attend where the gospel was preached. I put it in modern language [laughter], but they were wanting to go to a place where they recognized Yahweh as the true God.

And so they were going to Shechem, but the priests were falling on them upon they way and were actually murdering them. So, these were the individuals who believed in the sovereign mercy of God. These Calvinists were going off to Shechem, you see, and these priests were falling upon them. Ah you laugh, but that’s true to history. One does not have to know much history to know that when in the centuries just after Luther, one of the greatest of the tragedies of history occurred, and the Huguenots, the Calvinists, were fallen upon by the priests of Romanism and a tremendous persecution which spread all

over Europe; you go to Basel, Switzerland today, and you sit down with believers there and they will tell you that the massacre on St. Bartholomew’s Day was one of the greatest blessings that ever happened to Switzerland, because those Huguenots came to Switzerland. And in Basel, that ancient city, the effects of the coming of those individuals to the city of Basel is still found.

In my hometown of Charleston, South Carolina, we still have a Huguenot church. It’s the only one found in the country. In Charleston, the Guillardards, the Prelots, the Ravenelles, they are individuals who in large measure have built that city. Huguenots. You go into the Huguenot church, there’s nobody there any longer. They have apostatized, but they were a magnificent blessing.

But wherever they went, priests fell upon them. Priests also fell upon Martin Luther, great believer in the sovereign grace of God an unconditional election. Today it’s still happening. Go to Mexico, Mexican Indians, evangelists, go out to minister to the Indian people, the priests still fall upon them and slay them. One only has to do a little investigation to see that this is just as relevant as 1984.

So I suggest that perhaps is what Hosea means. So a band of priests murder on the way to Shechem. Surely they have committed crime. “In the house of Israel, I have seen a horrible thing, Ephraim’s harlotry is there. Israel has defiled itself. Alas O Judah (the Southern Kingdom) there is a harvest appointed for you also.” Is there a solution to the question, to the struggle of God? Shouldn’t God just blast them? That’s a question that people normally ask. Shouldn’t he just blast them? Shouldn’t he just damn them? Shouldn’t he just cast them away because of their evanescent goodness?

Ah, but do not the Scriptures say, “God does not cast away his people?” It isn’t that God has cast away his people, Paul says in Romans chapter 11 and verse 1. No, those ancient promises made to Abraham, confirmed to Isaac and Jacob, shall be fulfilled. And today in this auditorium, there are a number of believers, and you have received those ancient promises because the Scriptures say that Gentile believers today are grafted

into the Olive tree and have become fellow partakers with them in the root and fatness of the Oliver tree, and are actually called in Scripture, seed of Abraham. God’s great work continues.

And then there are individuals who have come to understand the grace and mercy of God whose lovingkindness is not evanescent. It’s not fading. It’s growing. And the knowledge of God is an experience into which they grow everyday. So the solution lies, I suggest, in the attitude of those expressed in verse 1, “Come, let us return to the Lord, for he has torn us, but he will heal us. He has wounded us, but he has bandaged us. He will revive us after two days, he will raise us up on the third day that we may live for him.”

The response of faith, the divine chastisement is the prayer and appeal that comes from repentance and mercy given by God. Did you notice those “he wills”? Come, let us return to the Lord, for he has torn us, but he will heal us. He has torn us, but he will bandage us. He will revive us after two days. He will raise us up that we may live on the third day before him.

We need not wonder about the people of God. He will gather all of his people into his fold – every single one of them. He will not lose one. And forever they will know his marvelous grace. The question is, are you one of them?

If you have any question about it, you can settle that question right now just as simply as receiving our Lord as your Savior is, to recognize your lost condition and need of him and to say simply in your heart, Lord I know I need Thee. I see that Christ, according to the Scriptures, died for sinners. I’m a sinner. I receive the gift of everlasting life and membership in the flock of our Lord through faith. Save me by Thy grace. That’s the beginning of the knowledge of God. May God help you to come to him, believe in him and grow in the knowledge of him. May we stand for the benediction?

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent words spoken so many years ago, but which speak to us in the 20th Century. O God, deliver us from the

fading faith, the vanishing, loyal love. May O God we be delivered from the emotions and brought to the knowledge of our Lord in our minds as well as in our emotions.

O God, we worship Thee for a Savior who loves his people to the uttermost, whose love never changes. How blessed we are.

If there should be someone here who has not come, who’s not in the flock yet, by Thy grace in their hearts at this very moment, by their confession of faith in him, give life.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.