



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 9:1-17

“Hosea on Human Nature”

TRANSCRIPT

We're turning for the Scripture reading this morning to Hosea chapter 9 verse 1 through verse 17. For those of you who may be visiting this morning, we of course have been, in the light of Mr. Pryor's announcement, been going through the prophecy of Hosea chapter by chapter, section by section. And in reaching this part of the prophecy, we have been dealing particularly with that section of the prophecy in which Hosea analyzes Israel's spiritual condition. And so beginning with chapter 9 and verse 1 he continues his analysis of the apostasy of the nation, and he writes,

“Do not rejoice, O Israel, with exultation like the nations!

For you have played the harlot, forsaking your God.

You have loved harlots' earnings on every threshing floor.”

Remember that in Hosea's day, Israel had gone after the baals, the false gods, who were fertility gods, and characteristic of the worship of the baals was not only the belief that if one worshipped them, one's crops would be very fruitful and one's business would be very good and one's family also would be very prosperous, but characteristic of it also was worship of the baals through sexual intercourse with the prostitutes who were

associated with the temple – both male and female for that matter – and through the act of physical intercourse, that magically would produce fertility in the flocks and fertility in the land, and also a blessing in the family.

So, when we read here, “You have loved harlots' earnings on every threshing floor,” he’s talking about the fact that when they had good crops they were attributing them to their worship of the false gods of Baal.

“Threshing floor and wine press will not feed them,

And the new wine will fail them.

They will not remain in the LORD'S land,

But Ephraim will return to Egypt,

And in Assyria they will eat unclean food.

They will not pour out libations of wine to the LORD,

Their sacrifices will not please Him

Their bread will be like mourners' bread;

All who eat of it will be defiled,

For their bread will be for themselves alone;

It will not enter the house of the LORD.

What will you do on the day of the appointed festival

And on the day of the feast of the LORD?

For behold, they will go because of destruction;

Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them (the Assyrians are going to come and fugitives also will flee to Egypt, Hosea prophesies)

Weeds will take over their treasures of silver;

Thorns will be in their tents.

The days of punishment have come,

The days of retribution have come;

Let Israel know this!

The prophet is a fool,

The inspired man is demented,

Because of the grossness of your iniquity,

And because your hostility is so great.”

Let me just say one word about this, because I’m going to try to lay a great deal of stress upon it, but I noticed in the 8:30 service I forgot to say this. And, it is something important, and I may forget it again.

When we read here, “the prophet is a fool, the inspired man is demented, we have really the only place in the prophecy of Hosea where Hosea tells us how he was received among the Northern Kingdom members, and so it’s a rather remarkable statement. It tells us how Hosea, in his day, felt that he was received. They said that he was a fool. They said that he was demented.

“Ephraim was a watchman with my God, a prophet;”

Now that text may be translated a bit different. I think it should be. The prophet is the watchman of Ephraim with my God, but -- instead of yet in the New American Standard Bible –

“Yet *or but* the snare of a bird catcher is in all his ways,

And there is only hostility in the house of his God.

They have gone deep in depravity

As in the days of Gibeah;

He will remember their iniquity,

He will punish their sins.”

This is the dark alternative to the grace of God in the New Covenant. For in the New Covenant, it is specifically said, I will forgive their iniquity, I will remember their sins no more. Here is the precise opposite: he will remember their iniquity, he will punish their sins.

“I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness;
I saw your forefathers as the earliest fruit on the fig tree in its first season
But they came to Baal-peor and devoted themselves to shame,
And they became as detestable as that which they loved.

As for Ephraim, their glory will fly away like a bird--
No birth, no pregnancy and no conception!
Though they bring up their children,
Yet I will bereave them until not a man is left.

Yes, woe to them indeed when I depart from them! (One can see that the doctrine of a loving God would have been, of course, a very, very definite part of the kind of message that the prophets proclaim, but also the idea of a God of judgment and justice and retribution was just as much a part of their message; in the 20th Century we have stressed one, we have forgotten the other)

Ephraim, as I have seen,
Is planted in a pleasant meadow like Tyre;
But Ephraim will bring out his children for slaughter.
Give them, O LORD--what will You give?
Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.
All their evil is at Gilgal;
Indeed, I came to hate them there!
Because of the wickedness of their deeds

I will drive them out of My house!

I will love them no more;

All their princes are rebels.”

By the way, those of you who have been listening over the years at Believers Chapel know that one of the great doctrines that we have proclaimed as been the immutable, eternal love of God for his people. It might seem strange that we should read here “I will love them no more,” and we must remember in the Bible to distinguish between the love of God that is eternal for the Nation Israel – the immutable, eternal love for the nation as a nation.

And remember that the love of God which is eternal and immutable for the Nation Israel is not for every individual Israelite, but for the nation as a nation. In other words, there is a future for the Nation Israel, but down through the years, generation after generation have disobeyed God, but as a result of their disobedience those generations, as we have seen from the experience that they had were not part of the ultimate people of God. And so when we read here, “I will love them no more” he is talking about the generations that form part of that eternal people of God, just as the generation in our Lord’s Day experienced divine retribution because of their rejection of the Lord. The eternal love has to do with the people of God – those who are both members of the Nation Israel and who are true believers, and will encompass one final generation at the time of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Ephraim is stricken,”

Isn’t that interesting? You know, in our hymnbooks we have places where hymn writers wrote that we are stricken, but because that became unpopular with people sitting in the churches, and the hymn writers have therefore changed some of the words in our old

favorite hymns, and we are no longer, for example, “stricken” which means that you are stricken and therefore destined to die, but we are only afflicted. But the prophets didn’t hesitate to say,

“Ephraim is stricken their root is dried up,
They will bear no fruit
Even though they bear children,
I will slay the precious ones of their womb.
My God will cast them away
Because they have not listened to Him;
And they will be wanderers among the nations.”

As of course, the nation has been since the judgment was carried out. May the Lord bless this reading of his word. Let’s bow together in a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are thankful that Thou hast set forth in the Scriptures not only a beautiful unfolding of the mercy and grace and love of the triune God, but Thou hast also revealed to us the other side of the nature of God, that Thou art a righteous and holy God.

And we thank Thee, Lord, for those of the prophets who have laid stress upon the beauties of divine holiness. And we pray, Lord, that Thou wilt give us an ever-deepening delight in the holiness of God and an ever-deepening desire to grow more into conformity to our God in heaven.

We’re grateful for these very stern words from the Prophet Hosea, for we so often need to be warned and admonished ourselves. We thank Thee for the means which Thou dost in grace keep us, cleaving to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. And Lord, we desire to cleave to him more and more as the days go by.

We thank Thee for the privilege of serving Thee in the year 1984, these remarkable days and critical days, it seems, and we pray that we may not lose the opportunity that is ours to give testimony to Thy grace to us. We worship Thee today. We give praise to Thy name. As we think of all of the attributes that are part of Thy being and character, to think that we, mere creatures may offer Thee praise and glorify Thee is almost too much for us. We thank Thee, Lord. We acknowledge that we are simply creatures. Transform us. Motivate us. And if it be Thy will, Lord, use us for Thy glory.

We pray for our country and its leadership, especially this year, Lord. Give us wisdom and guidance. May Thy hand so rule our circumstances that things may turn out for the glory of our God and for the blessing of the church of Jesus Christ. We pray for those true churches of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ where the gospel is proclaimed. We thank Thee for the many places in this country and over the face of this earth where a message concerning Jesus Christ and purity goes forth. Bless Lord Thy word.

And we pray, particularly, for the Chapel and its ministry. For its elders and deacons, its members and friends, for its ministries over the radio and in the printed page and especially through the tape ministry – the many who listen in these forms – and for the Bible classes and other forms of ministry. O God, may Thy hand be upon it for spiritual good.

We pray for those who are troubled with serious problems, for those whose names also are listed in our calendar of concern, we commit them all to Thee. We pray, Lord, that Thy hand may be upon us and we may have the experience of true fellowship with Thee in the proclamation of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We praise Thee, we worship Thee. We express to Thee our love for him, for our triune God. Use us Lord, if it please Thee, to glorify Thy name. Bless us in this service as we sing, as we hear the word. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] In one sense we could call chapter 9 of the prophecy of Hosea, “Hosea’s Doctrine of Depravity.” We have entitled the sermon, however, “Hosea on Human Nature.”

Do you know what the trouble of the church is? Well, it’s not enough madness. The early church as aflame with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Reformation Church was blazing, too, with the testimony of God to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, and justification by faith. The New England Church of the 18th Century was also on fire for the testimony to God and his sovereign grace. And if we really believed our creeds and the things that we say that we stand for, we also would be blazing with a roaring flame.

One modern commentator, analyzing the condition of the modern church today has said, “The condition of the church is a church in which they worship the great common denominator of all the faiths.” In other words, we’ve eliminated the unique things which mark Christianity out from other faiths, and we have gathered together all of the things that all of the different faiths can agree upon, and we therefore are preaching this great common denominator.

“We dwell,” he went on to say, “along the temperate zone of tasteless spiritual tepidity, just like the Laodiceans to whom the Lord Jesus addressed a very significant letter in the Book of Revelation.”

William Temple made a very famous statement. I have cited it before here, but it’s a good one, “Why any many should have troubled to crucify the Christ of liberal Protestantism has always been a mystery.” And if one reflects upon this, he can see the insight that the former Archbishop of Canterbury had. Why would anyone want to crucify the Christ of modern Christianity? For he is presented simply as a good man. He does not in any way offend our sense of self-esteem or our sense of dignity, and therefore, the reasons for the crucifixion of our Lord no longer appear in the doctrine that they proclaim, but of course, things are really a great deal different, and Hosea gives us a

much more realistic picture of human nature than we find in modern theology. It is a continuation of his analysis of Israel’s human condition, and to sum it up in one little word, it is bad.

Hosea’s word is found in verse 9, “They have gone deep in depravity.” “As a race,” wrote P.T. Forsyth, the Barth before Barth, “we are not even stray sheep or wandering prodigals merely. We are rebels taken with weapons in our hands.” We talk about the doctrine of total depravity, and what we mean by that is not the total corruption of human nature, because man, of course, may exhibit even greater degrees of depravity than he has exhibited so far. One must be careful where he puts the adjective, total, so total depravity is the corruption of the total human nature. That is, the corruption brought by Adam’s fall in the Garden of Eden touches all of our faculties – our mind, our will, our emotions, and so it is the corruption of the total human nature, not the total corruption of human nature.

So let us remember that, and as we read the Bible, we will see that the doctrine of total depravity; that is, the corruption of the total human nature, is a biblical doctrine, and one that we should believe. And not only should believe, but it is the fundamental doctrine, and it throws light on all of the other saving processes of the Lord God.

It’s difficult for us to believe things like this, of course, because we are men who have been touched by the Fall, and our minds do not see clearly. Our wills are in rebellion against the Lord God and our emotions are corrupt, and so when we hear the truth, we do not respond. We find many reasons for disbelieving the things that the Scriptures say because we do not think clearly. For example, the idea that a little baby, a little innocent baby – a little sweet, innocent baby – a little precious baby that has not done anything, it would seem, is a totally depraved individual is difficult for an unspiritual mind to believe in.

I love the statement made by Sir Sydney Smith. He was Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, and was a man who should know

from personal experience, because probably he had as much experience with the birth of children as any other man in Scotland in his day. He said, “A child comes into the world aggressive, acquisitive, and in all ways a potential criminal.” Amazing, isn’t it? It’s true. A child comes into this world – yes, that little infant – comes into this world, aggressive, acquisitive – if they’re not aggressive and acquisitive, we would wonder if they were normal.

We really would. We’d take them to the doctor and say something is wrong. But when they’re aggressive and acquisitive – now we don’t understand it that way, mind you; we think they’re sweet and lovely. But, if they don’t come in aggressive, acquisitive, we would think that perhaps something is wrong, because the other characteristics would be different from other infants. But when Sir Sydney said, “And in all ways a potential criminal,” he was also speaking truth.

Now, you can see from Hosea chapter 9 that the Prophet Hosea would have believed something like that, because here is the chosen people, the Nation Israel, the chosen people who have had poured upon them the divine revelation of a sovereign, merciful, gracious God, selected them, chosen them out from the mass of humanity to do for them what he did for no other nation, and yet now, they not only have become indifferent to the things, they not only have hewed themselves out, they not only have departed from the Lord, but they’ve hewed themselves out broken cisterns in which there is not water.

They have not only departed from the Lord, but they have gone after the baals, the false gods, and so the prophet now will outline a series of denunciations, really, but it all adds up to the fact that Israel has gone into the fullest expression of the grossness of their iniquity, and there is nothing left but divine retribution.

There are five distinct notes sounded in the chapter, one of the commentators has pointed out, and I think he’s right. First of all, there is the denunciation of joy. In the first two verses the prophet says, “Do not rejoice, O Israel, in exultation like the nations,

for you have played the harlot, forsaking your God, you have harlot’s earnings on every threshing floor,” and you can see here is a materialistic people now, and they not only are materialistic, they not only have departed from the Lord God, but they have traced their acquisition of material things not to the Lord God, as if God has blessed them, but they have traced these things to their wicked gods, the baals.

And furthermore, in the worship of the baals, they have entered into the grossest form of immorality. And in the light of that, have the nerve to suggest that the reason they’re being blessed is because they worship the false gods. Evidently, when he said, “Rejoice not,” the prophet was speaking over some harvest that had taken place, and it must have been a very good one and the people must have praised the gods of Baal. But he points out it should be a time of mourning, because joy is from now on forbidden fruit for the Nation Israel. They have loved their harlot’s earnings on every threshing floor.

Now, the second of the notes is the note from departure from the land, and because of their attitude, the prophet says that judgment must come. In verse 3 through verse 6, he expatiates upon that. He talks about the coming exile. The Northern Kingdom is going to go into exile and as a result of that, they’re going to be compelled to eat unblest food. Listen to some of the things he threatens them with. You know, it’s rather strange, I think, that he should threaten them with this in the light of modern life.

Suppose that the Lord God were to threaten modern life with threats like this: you will no longer be able to go to church on Sunday. You will no longer be able to hear sermons. You will no longer have committees call upon you and ask you to pledge certain funds for the growth of the church and the construction of the new building. You will no longer be required to assemble during the week for the prayer meeting. I can imagine that the modern church would throw up their hands and say, “Hallelujah.”

But you see, Israel dwelt so much in a religious atmosphere that to judge in this way was something that was significant. Listen to what he says, “They will not remain in the Lord’s land, but Ephraim will return to Egypt; in Assyria they will eat unclean food.”

That is, they’ll be required to eat food that is not kosher. That doesn’t seem like such a great judgment. But, if you can reflect upon the way in which religion was their whole life, everything was related to the Mosaic law: their civil life, their personal life, their moral life. Everything was governed by the law of God. This was, in effect, a word to the end that their whole culture would be overthrown, and they would no longer be able to live as a people as before.

“They will not pour out libations of wine to the Lord; their sacrifices will not please him. Their bread will be like mourner’s bread. All who eat of it will be defiled, for their bread will be for themselves alone. It will not enter the house of the Lord. What will you do on the day of the appointed festival and on the day of the feast of the LORD?” What will you do, then, in other words. You’re not going to be able to observe your feasts, “For behold, they will go because of destruction; Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them. Weeds will take over their treasures of silver; thorns will be in their [sic., tents].” Now we can understand some of these judgments, but others, they’re religious and striking, and it reflects the fact that the truth was at one time at the heart of everything they did.

You know, that leads me to reflect upon this fact. That in Christianity, the ultimate that God desires is that the things that we believe affect us just as much. That is, they affect us in all of our life: in our social life, in our business life, in our civil life, in our personal life – everything is to be under the teaching of the word of God.

Now, the third note is the destruction of discernment. The time of judgment is now described: its season and its source. “The days of punishment have come, the days of retribution have come; let Israel know this!” And if I may make a simple word of application, the days of punishment are soon coming, the days of retribution have or will come, let Believers Chapel know this! There is such a thing as divine retribution, and divine retribution affects those who are religious people just as much as it affects those who are not.

In Matthew chapter 7 in verse 6, the Lord Jesus said, “Do not give that which is holy to the dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you to pieces.” Implicit in that is these doctrine of divine retribution. But then in chapter 13, the Lord Jesus speaking to the generation of his day announces to them that the time has come for retribution to them. He followed them in the line of Hosea, and speaking to generation of his day, he affirmed the same thing, that that generation was headed for divine retribution.

I wonder what our Lord would say with reference to our generation today were he in our midst? Listen to what he said to the disciples in his great chapter on the parables, Matthew chapter 13 and verse 10, “And the disciples came and said to him, ‘Why do you speak them in parables?’” He’s just begun that. He had not been speaking before in parables. “And he answered and said to them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him shall more be given, and he shall have an abundance. But whosoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore, I speak to them in parables, because while seeing, they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand, and in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled which says, you will keep on hearing but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive, for the heart of this people has become dull, and with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn again and I should heal them.

“But blessed are your eyes, because they see and your ears because they hear (he’s talking to the disciples, mind you), for truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see what you see and did not see it, and to hear what you hear and did not hear it.” Days of retribution. That is a fact of the ministry of the word of God.

Now we read on in verse 7, and amazingly, the prophet says, “The prophet is a fool, the inspired man is demented.” I’d like to spend a bit of time on this.

Now there are several things to be noted, and first of all, one should ask himself the question, when the prophet says, the prophet is a fool, the inspired man (or the man of the Spirit) is mad, what does he mean by prophet? Is it possible that he refers to the false prophets? Well, of course, it is possible, in which case he would be speaking about the false prophets who flattered the people and thus, they will learn of their falsity. So he says, the prophet, the false prophet, is a fool, the fellow who gives people what they want. The inspired man is demented.

Well, it’s possible. It is true of course in the history of the Old Testament and the history of the Christian faith, there have been people who have gone out and sought to minister the word of God in the light of what the people in the pew wanted. I do not of course know the personal faith of Robert Schuler. I only know this about him. Mr. Shuler says in one of his books that when he went to California, he decided that the first thing that he would do would be to visit all of the people in their homes and ask them what they wanted. And then he said, “When I found out what they wanted, that is what I gave them.” Well, I’m not passing judgment on Mr. Shuler. I don’t know him that well, but I would like to say simply this, that that is not the method by which a Christian should seek to set forth the testimony of Jesus Christ.

We are not governed by what people want. We are to be in such relationship to the Lord God that we give them what the Scriptures say about them. So, it’s possible that when he says, the prophet is a fool, the inspired man is mad, he’s talking about the false prophet who gives them what they want.

But on the other hand, it’s much more likely that he’s talking about the true prophet. And he is telling now what the people are saying about the true prophet. Now this is the interpretation of many of the ancient Hebrews. It’s also the interpretation of many of the Protestant interpreters, and some of the most recent interpreters have finally

come again to this interpretation. It seems to be more in harmony with the expression, the man of the Spirit, which does not seem to be used of false prophets.

So the prophet is a fool, the man of the Spirit is mad. He’s talking about what people are saying about the true prophets of God and in fact, what they are saying about Hosea. This is, I say, the only place in the prophet where we get some indication of what the people really thought about Hosea. You may have thought that if Hosea came on the scene, he would be asked to be the pastor of the First Baptist or the First Presbyterian Church of any city that he desired to live in. No. It would have been quite otherwise. He would have been the man who was regarded as mad or as crazy. The man of the Spirit is mad, the prophet is a fool.

Now there’s a great principle here, and I think we sometimes overlook the fact of it. Human nature does not change. Well, someone says, we do change. We live in a changing society. Well, it’s true there are many things that do change. If you want to see things that change, go back and get one of your old family albums and open it up and look at the pictures of your grandmother and your grandfather, and you could point to me and say, look, we do change. Look at the clothes my grandmother is wearing. Look at the clothes my grandfather is wearing. Look at the way he cuts his hair. That probably would be the most revealing thing, because if you went back to your grandfather and grandmother, you’d find – not mine – if you went back as far as my grandfather, then would look very much up to date. Nevertheless, the facts are that they are still the same people.

I have a little Testament. And in this little Testament – really it’s a Bible. It was given to my grandfather by the woman that he was going to marry. And she gave it to him, this little Bible, with some words about his spiritual condition. In other words, there was Christian concern. That kind of thing is the same thing. The same kind of individual. A person could’ve written those things in 1984. But they look different. Manners change, but people do not.

I read a very interesting editorial in *Time* magazine about six months ago. It was an essay, really, in which a writer wrote an essay entitled, “Deep down, we’re all alike, right? Wrong.” Well, he went on to point out that people do think that we’re all alike all over the fact of this globe. And since we’re all alike, what do we want? Well, we all want peace, we all want security. So, if we could just have communication between nations, since we’re all alike, the Russians want peace and security, the Syrians want peace and security, Israel wants peace and security, Israel wants peace and security. Salvador, they want peace and security. Nicaragua, they want peace and security, and oh, Fidel, really deep down within, what he wants is peace and security. So if we can just communicate this to people, then we would have a much better society, would we not have?

And unfortunately, this basic tenet of modernistic theology, the basic tenet of human nature, which really is a theological thing, and you can see how our theology affects our politics, our life. And furthermore, when our theology is wrong, everything else that flows out of it is wrong, also. And poor old Secretary of State Schulz took a little trip to Syria, thinking of course if he could just communicate with them – after all, doesn’t Hafez al-Assad, doesn’t he really want peace and security? Oh yes, he would say I want peace and security; I want peace and security by taking over Lebanon. And, so on. And, ol’Fidel will say, I want peace and security by taking over countries in Central America, and we all want peace and security, but only on certain conditions. It’s true, we want the same thing, and we’re alike in that respect. But unfortunately, we’re in sin.

There are different degrees of sin, of course, but basically, men are sinners. And in this essay, which was surprisingly good for *Time* magazine in my opinion, the author went on to say something like that. He says, “Where does this idea of a world of likes come from? In part from a belief in universal brotherhood, a belief that is parroted, however, when one pretends that the ideal already exists. It’s the same old doctrine of the Enlightenment translated into modern life and practiced by our politicians,

unfortunately, who are utterly blind to the true nature, it seems, of human nature.” So, the prophet is a fool; the man of the Spirit is mad.

There is something about this that is very significant. This little word “fool,” incidentally, is a word that translates a Hebrew word, *eviyal*, which means not “morally a fool” – *nabal* is the word; we have Nabal in the Old Testament – that’s a fool, but that’s a moral kind of fool. But this is a word that means inane, silly, idiotic, asinine – that’s the kind of thing they’re saying about Hosea. The idea of Hosea saying the things that he is saying, I can just imagine: he’s a religious man, he doesn’t know anything about life.

And the other things they said about the prophets are very revealing, too. Let’s go back to Isaiah chapter 28 and see what they thought about this great man who wrote this magnificent prophecy of Isaiah, this man of the court, this very well-educated, very cultured, very well-instructed individual who has written a kind of book that not a man in his day could have written. And unfortunately, this man said to the people of the Northern Kingdom, “Woe to the proud crowd of the drunkards of Ephraim and the fading flowers of its glorious beauty, which is at the head of the fertile valley of those who are overcome with wine.”

Now what do you think that the people of Isaiah’s day thought about him? Well listen to the religious leaders, the real leaders of the land. This is what they said about Isaiah: to whom would he teach knowledge? And to whom would he interpret the message? Those just weaned from milk? In other words, Isaiah’s doctrine is for babies. It’s for little children, not for grown up, cultured, educated intellectuals such as we are – those just taken from the breast.

For he says, “Order on order, order on order, line on line, line on line, a little here, a little there; indeed, he will speak to his people through stammering lips and a foreign tongue.” In other words, Isaiah’s doctrine is simple stuff. It’s the kind of thing you learn in first grade: line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, Jane loves Joe, etc., that kind of teaching. That’s what they said about the prophet. In other

words, he was made. He was inane. He was silly. Think of that – Isaiah, this magnificent prophecy that has stood the test of time, Isaiah is mad. He’s stupid.

And Jeremiah. What did they say about this magnificent, heroic prophet, maybe the most heroic prophet of the Old Testament? For forty years, he stood faithfully for the word of God. What did Shemiah the false prophet say of him? He’s crazy. He’s mad. Demented. What a tremendous apostolic succession there is in this word, “mad.” The prophet is mad because the man of the Spirit is demented.

Think of Paul. Here is the magnificent apostle to the Gentiles, and he’s standing before Agrippa, and he’s explaining the Christian faith, and he’s exhorting him because of righteousness and judgment and self-control, and Festus cannot stand it any longer and he blurts out, “Paul is mad! Much learning has made you mad!”

When the Lord Jesus was here in the flesh, what did the Jewish leaders say of him? They said, specifically, John 10:20 says, “He is mad; he has a demon.” The Pope said, “Luther ought to be in Bedlam.” They said the same thing about the Wesleys, and they replied, “Fools and madmen, let us be, yet is our sure trust in Thee.”

Now think of the greatness of Isaiah, that magnificent prophecy. Anybody who’s ever studied Isaiah in the Hebrew text, in our theological seminary, will affirm the greatness of that book. And think of Jeremiah, that magnificent, heroic prophet likened to our Lord himself. Think also of the Apostle Paul. Think of Hosea. And then, of course, think of the head of this succession of men of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and one can see who is really the madman, who is really the demented man. It is not Jeremiah. It is not Hosea, it is not our Lord, it is not Paul – it is the man who in his heart says, “The prophet is a fool; the man of the Spirit is demented.” It is they who are the fools.

You know, we learn a whole lot by studying the word of God. We learn a lot about man. We learn a lot about God. And we cannot live a life that is satisfying to us and to the Lord God without a true knowledge of the word of God. And so often as Christians, we fail to give the word the primacy that it deserves.

Some years ago there was a man by the name of Jim McGinley, well-known by evangelicals because McGinley was an Irishman, and Mr. McGinley was a man who was very faithful to the word of God, and totally fearless when it came to preaching the Scriptures. He was so fearless that wherever he went, he made both enemies and friends. Great friends, great enemies. And of course, that’s one of the signs of preaching the truth, is it not? If our message is not offensive, we’re not preaching the cross.

Paul said that his message was the offense of the cross. The preaching of the cross is foolishness. He said, if you’re preaching salvation by what you do, then the offense of the cross is ceased. If men, when you preach God’s sovereignty, do not say, “Well, that’s offensive to our claim to free will,” then of course you’re not preaching the gospel of the cross. If you preach total depravity and human inability, you will offend the dignity of man. And if you do not do that, then you are not preaching the truth of the word of God.

If you preach that the gospel comes by divine revelation, this offends man’s natural wisdom, and so, if you do not do that, and you do not have the offense and the results of it, you are not preaching the gospel of the New Testament. If you preach effectual redemption through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ alone, well of course, you’ll offend man’s pride. But if you do not do that, you are not preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you do not preach the lordship of Jesus Christ over other so-called lords, and thereby offend man’s self-esteem and his self-respect, interpreted as modern psychology likes to interpret it, then of course, you are not preaching the word of God. One of the characteristic things of the preaching of the word of God is that it is offensive to the natural man.

Now, Jim McGinley went to preach in one of our Christian schools. As he was being introduced, the president of the school, an evangelist, naturally, was a man who like evangelism, and so he went into a little bit of spiel about how if you do not have

evangelism as the first and only thing in your Christian life, you’re really not living according to the word of God.

Now Mr. McGinley as an evangelist had been so effective for many years, that it was amazing that he had introduced it this way. But anyway, the president went on to say at the conclusion of his statement, “If you’re not out winning souls every day, in the Christian ministry, you are a flop!”

Mr. McGinley was a man who, if you could get him aroused, he was very, very aroused. So he got up and he went up to the pulpit, and very quietly he said, “Noah preached for 120 years, and he won only eight souls. What a flop. Jeremiah preached for forty years, and hardly won a soul. What a flop. Daniel ministered the word of God over a lengthy period of time, very, very few were won. What a flop Daniel was. Isaiah was sent to a people, and he was sent with a message of judgment. He was told to teach them if they had ears to hear, but they could not hear, and that as a matter of fact, only a tenth, ultimately, would come to the knowledge of the true God. What a flop. Ezekiel was sent to people who had stiff-necks, and they would not respond to him, so the Lord God said. What a flop. Elijah preached the word of God to his generation, and he himself knew such little fruit from his ministry that he could actually say, I am left alone. Now, the Lord had said to him, wait, Elijah, 7,000 have not bowed the knee to Baal, but Elijah didn’t even know about them. What a flop. And then the Lord Jesus himself came to preach the same message that Isaiah preached, for he applied the text to his generation, and as a matter of fact, at the end of his ministry, he said, that he had a little flop. So our Lord, what a flop.” You see how foolish we can be when we do not pay attention to the word of God.

Evangelism is important. All of us should be constantly giving testimony to Christ. But over and over all of these manmade suggestions and admonitions, we should keep before us plainly the things that the Scriptures teach.

Now why is it that they say, the prophet is a fool, the inspired man is demented? He says in the 7th verse, “Because of the grossness of your iniquity, and because their hostility is so great.” This is the reason for their false conception. Their iniquities have separated them from the Lord God. They had mislaid God; they had forgotten God as we have been trying to point out, with the result that they had misunderstood him, and it was natural that they should therefore hate the prophet who spoke the words of truth that were so offensive to their pride.

Let me tell you just a little story. I’m sorry I’m going to keep you a few minutes over time. There’s a beautiful little story of Jehosaphat and Ahab. Jehosaphat the king of the Southern Kingdom, Ahab the king of the Northern Kingdom, related a bit by marriage. Jehosaphat decided he would pay a little visit to the Northern Kingdom, and when he arrived at the Northern Kingdom, well, Ahab, who as the incarnation of iniquity and depravity, said to Jehosaphat, who was a well-meaning kind of fellow but he had no spiritual backbone much – a little bit, but not too much – and so he said to him, “You know, Jehosaphat, Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we’re still doing nothing to take it out of the hand of Syria.” And so he said to Jehosaphat, “Will you go with me to battle at Ramoth-gilead?”

Jehosaphat said, “I am as you are. My people is your people; my horses is your horses.” In other words he said, yes, I’ll go with you. However, he said, please inquire first for the word of the Lord – Jehovah.

So the King of Israel gathered the prophets – 400 of them – gathered the 400 together and he said to them, “Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall I refrain?” They all said, all 400 of them, “Go up, for the Lord will give into the hand of the king.”

And the Jehosaphat said one of the wisest things he ever said in his life. I don’t know how he got the courage to do it. “Is there not yet a prophet of Jehovah here that we may inquire of him?”

And so, here comes Ahab with this magnificent statement, because it’s so revealing. “There is yet one man by whom we may inquire, but I hate him.” I hate him. I always think of that little cartoon where Charlie Brown is reflecting, and he turns to Linus and he says, “Nobody likes me. What kind of advice, Linus would you give in a situation like that?” And Linus says, “Well, I would find out what was really wrong with me, and I would do something to improve my situation.” And Charlie Brown says, “I hate that answer.” [Laughter]

So, yes there is a man of the Lord here of whom we may inquire, but I hate him because he doesn’t prophecy good concerning me, only evil. He’s Micaiah son of Imlah.” And so he sends off for Micaiah, and in the meantime the prophets try to persuade him, and there is one particular prophet, Zedekiah the son of Kenaanah. He made horns of iron and said, “This is what you Ahab are going to do to those Syrians; you’re going to gore them.”

And so, Micaiah’s sent for. And he must’ve been a marvelous prophet, too, I’m sure he was unpopular with everybody. He came into the midst of the court and so they asked him, “Behold now the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king, please let your word be like one of them and speak favorably.”

Micaiah said, “As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I shall speak.” When he came to the king, the king said to him, “Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?” And he answered him, “Go up and succeed, and the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.” You cannot – I know I could never adequately described the dripping sarcasm with which Micaiah said that, because he said with such sarcasm that Ahab knew he meant the opposite. So he said, “How many times must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?”

So he said,

"I saw all Israel

Scattered on the mountains,

Like sheep which have no shepherd.

And the LORD said, 'These have no master.

Let each of them return to his house in peace.'"

Then the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, “Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?”

Micaiah said, “Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?’ And one said this while another said that. Then a spirit came forward and stood before the LORD and said, 'I will entice him.' And the LORD said to him, 'How?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' Then He said, 'You are to entice him and also prevail. Go and do so.' Now therefore, behold, the LORD has put a deceiving spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; and the LORD has proclaimed disaster against you.” That’s a true prophet. That’s a prophet of Jehovah. That man’s not mad. That man’s as sound as a man can be in the faith. It’s Ahab who’s mad. It’s the 400 prophets who are mad. It’s all of those other people who are mad who do not understand the word of God.

Well, the prophet concludes by saying there’s going to be a declining birth rate, and finally he concludes the chapter by saying they will be wanderers among the nations, and Ephraim who is fruitful, for her name means “fruitful,” will bear no fruit, and they will be punished just like Cain who was made a wanderer in the earth. And so, Israel is scattered to the four corners of the earth, and God’s word is true and the word of men is false.

What we need, as I said at the beginning, is more madness. Madness for Christ. The real fool is the one who counts the prophet a fool. It was Festus who was the real madman, and so may God give us some madmen – not painted fire – but madmen for

Jesus Christ, madmen for the word of God, madmen, that is, that the world thinks are mad but who are true to the gospel of the Lord Jesus and true to the teachings of the apostles.

If you’re here this morning, and you have never believed in Christ, we say, in the same spirit of these madmen, you are a sinner. You are heading for a Christless eternity, just as sure as you’re sitting in Believers Chapel, if you have never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are lost and you are heading for eternal judgment. There is a way of escape through the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ. He has borne the judgment of sinners’ sins, and the invitation is issued to all.

If a shaft of light from the Spirit of God has come into your mind so that you see that your condition is that of a lost man under divine judgment, you may flee at this very moment to him and say, “O God, I know that I am lost. I know that I am guilty. I know that I am undone. I hear that Christ has died for sinners; I am a sinner. I come for forgiveness of my sins.” And God in his marvelous grace will grant to you, in grace, the forgiveness of sins, a status in the family of God as son, justified by faith and headed for a Christ-filled eternity. May God in his grace enable you to come. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are thankful to Thee for the ministry of the Prophet Hosea. How wonderful it is to have men who are made strong by the word of God who give us truth. And Lord, enable us to go forth as representatives of the truth of God, to faithfully and boldly proclaim the salvation that is only through the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. We pray in his name. Amen.

