



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Hosea 10:1-15

“The Danger of the Divided Heart”

TRANSCRIPT

This morning we're turning to the tenth chapter of the prophecy of Hosea, and we read the entire chapter for our Scripture reading. For those of you who may have other editions, I'm reading from the New American Standard Bible, and there are a few places in this chapter in particular that the sense of the words will be slightly different from the sense found in the Authorized Version.

“Israel is a luxuriant vine;
He produces fruit for himself
The more his fruit,
The more altars he made;
The richer his land,
The better he made the sacred pillars.

Their heart is faithless;
Now they must bear their guilt (and here of course, Yahweh's verdict upon them because of the description just given is introduced)

The LORD will break down their altars
And destroy their sacred pillars.

Surely now they will say, "We have no king,

For we do not revere the LORD.

As for the king, what can he do for us?" (You can see they are living in the days in which a number of their kings have been assassinated; they are under kings whose wickedness was well-known, and yet they themselves were filled with hypocrisy amidst their outward religious form. But they speak out of that situation,) As for the king, what can he do for us?"

They speak mere words,

With worthless oaths they make covenants;

And judgment sprouts like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.

The inhabitants of Samaria will fear

For the calf of Beth-aven”

Remember, and I say this particularly for those who have not been here in the exposition of Hosea, when the Northern Kingdom separated from the Southern Kingdom, Jeroboam realized that it was necessary for them to do something about the religious situation, because there was only one place in which it was right to worship God, and that was in Jerusalem, so everyone had to go to Jerusalem, just as today there is only one way of salvation, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

He realized they must do something to counter that, because if the Northern Kingdom citizens kept going to the south, it wouldn't be long before again they would be in allegiance to the Southern Kingdom rather than his kingdom. So he feared that and therefore he set up two places of worship in the north, including Bethel, where he also constructed golden calves in order to have an object of worship.

Well now, Beth-el means “house of God,” but by setting up one of the golden calves in Beth-el, house of God, they of course were simply advertising their apostasy, and Hosea does not mince words as we know. He speaks the forthright truth. He

doesn’t really care if its considered dignified or not, and so instead of calling Beth-el, house of God, he calls it Beth-aven. *Aven* is the Hebrew word that means “iniquity.” And so by virtue of the false worship, Bethel, house of God has become house of iniquity to him. And that is what he means when we read here, “The inhabitants of Samaria, the Northern Kingdom, will fear for the calf of Beth-aven.”

“Indeed, its people will mourn for it,
And its idolatrous priests will cry out over it,
Over its glory, since it has departed from it. (So the prophet is prophesying the time is soon to come when the Northern Kingdom will go into captivity and one of the things that will go into captivity with them is their god and its representation, the golden calf at Bethel. Now he says in the 6th verse,)

The thing itself will be carried to Assyria
As tribute to King Jareb;”

Now there was no King Jareb. Jareb is a form derived from the Hebrew word *riyb*, which means something like “to have a contention or a case against,” and so what Hosea’s alluding to is the fact that the Assyrian kings, and particularly the one involved here, were kings just like modern kings.

If, for example, Adolph Hitler would like to take Austria, he would raise some little area of dispute with them and magnify it and use that as an excuse to take Austria. And if he wants to take Czechoslovakia, he will raise some little issue between the two, and using that as an excuse or a ruse, he will take Czechoslovakia. Or, the Soviets may raise an issue with Afghanistan and take over Afghanistan.

George Adam Smith, the great Scottish interpreter, one of the finest of the students of the prophets, and particularly the Minor Prophets, too, translating “King Jareb” because it means something “king pick-a-quarrel,” so this is a designation of the king, king pick-a-

quarrel. In other words, the king and then the verb which means something like “to have a case against” or “a law court case against.” So, as tribute to king pick-a-quarrel,

“Ephraim will be seized with shame

And Israel will be ashamed of its own counsel.

Samaria will be cut off with her king

Like a stick on the surface of the water.

Also the high places of Aven, (notice, now, he’s talking about the high places of Bethel, but he calls it the high places of Aven) the sin of Israel, will be destroyed;

Thorn and thistle will grow on their altars;”

You know, this is all so interesting. You could have many sermons on many of these chapters, because of course, what he is talking about when he says, “Also the high places of Aven, or iniquity, the sin of Israel will be destroyed,” he’s expressing God’s attitude toward those who would set up different ways of salvation from the way set out in the divine revelation. And so, what the prophet calls another way of salvation, God calls, through the prophet, iniquity.

So, for example, for us to assume that there is some way of salvation apart from the sovereign grace of God through Jesus Christ, that’s not just a bad idea. That’s not just an error. That’s sin. And he calls it, the sin of Israel will be destroyed. Thorn and thistle will grow on their altars. In other words, this is the last word on man-made religions.

And of course, where we’re situated in North Dallas, we have vivid illustrations of it, even within the community [laughter]. I’m so glad they moved nearby.¹ [More laughter] There is such a contrast constantly between what the Scriptures say and what men say as over against the Scriptures.

¹ Believers Chapel of Dallas is situated on property adjacent to a Mormon Temple.

“Then they will ^(v)say to the mountains,
'Cover us!' And to the hills, 'Fall on us!'

There is going to come one giant prayer meeting of the lost, but their great, giant prayer meeting is deliver us from any encounter with the Lord God. And if we can persuade the mountains and the hills to fall upon us, that will be better than encounter a wrathful God. And it's true, it will be.

“From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel;
There they stand!
Will not the battle against the sons of iniquity overtake them in Gibeah?
When it is My desire, I will chastise them; (notice the note of the sovereign providence of God, when it is My desire I will chastise them)
And the peoples will be gathered against them
When they are bound for their double guilt. (Yes, they resort to the false God Baal, and then, when they're in difficulty, they run to their worldly allies in Egypt and Syria)
Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh,
But I will come over her fair neck with a yoke;”

You know, I've said a number of times that I grew up in the city and did not grow up in the country. You miss something when you don't grow up in the country – I know. I wish it were possible to grow up in the city and in the country, because there are so many things in the Scriptures that are adjusted to a rural background. Now, I have to use my dictionary and my encyclopedia every now and then, because terms that have to do with the country are not too familiar to me.

“Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh.”

I never really realized what was behind that text until I realized through just a little bit of research that for a heifer or an animal to thresh is relative easy kind of task. And in fact, in Israel particularly, when the animals threshed, they were not permitted to put a muzzle over their mouths because they had the freedom, the animals did, to eat whatever was lying in the field, because those who do the work have the right to share in it. The Apostle Paul makes illustration of that in the New Testament, in 1 Corinthians chapter 9. So, what God says is, “Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh, but I will come over her fair neck with a yoke;” In other words, she’s having, relatively speaking, light work for now by the grace of God, but because of their iniquity, he’s going to bring them into captivity.

“I will harness Ephraim,
Judah will plow, Jacob will harrow for himself.
Sow with a view to righteousness,
Reap in accordance with kindness;
Break up your fallow ground,
For it is time to seek the LORD
Until He comes to rain righteousness on you.”

What wonderful exhortation this is. Seek the Lord until he comes to rain righteousness on you. Now, you can also notice the chain of causality in the next verse,

“You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice,
You have eaten the fruit of lies (and so we have the plowing and then the reaping
and then the eating. And so against that background, the prophet speaks)

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Because you have trusted in your way, in your numerous warriors,
Therefore a tumult will arise among your people,
And all your fortresses will be destroyed,
As Shalman (probably a reference to Shalmaneser, the Assyrian king) destroyed
Beth-arbel on the day of battle,
When mothers were dashed in pieces with their children.
Thus it will be done to you at Bethel because of your great wickedness.
At dawn the king of Israel will be completely cut off.”

So, Hosea prophecies the end of the Northern Kingdom because of their departure from the word of God. Let’s look to the Lord in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these words spoken so plainly, so directly by the great prophet to the Northern Kingdom, and we thank Thee for the boldness and the courage with which Hosea spoke, and we thank Thee for the meaningful, beautiful language which Thou didst give him to use, to make so vivid what it means to depart from the living God and to go after the false gods. Deliver us, O Lord, deliver us from failure to worship Thee, deliver us from the divided heart, deliver us from the deceitful and tricky heart. O God, give us the simplicity of a love for Thee that arises out of devotion to Thee due to the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And Father, we ask Thy blessing upon this congregation of people, and we pray that all of the needs that might exist in their hearts might be met through the ministry of the word of God. And for those who are suffering for various reasons, we commit them to Thee. We remember those in our calendar of concern with special attention. And Lord, minister to them and supply the things that they need in accordance with Thy good and gracious will for us. We pray for this assembly. For it’s elders and deacons and friends and visitors today, O God, may we have the sense of Thy presence within our midst. May the Lord Jesus be exalted in the things that are said. Bless also the many

ministries that go forth from this place. May O God there be true fruitfulness that will redound to Thy glory. We ask Thy blessing upon each one of us as we listen to Thy word this morning. For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

[Message] The subject for this morning in our continued exposition of the prophecy of Hosea is “The Danger of the Divided Heart.” “Like a skillful and experienced physician, the Prophet Hosea keeps probing at the core of Israel’s sin, namely, their idolatry,” so says Professor Charles Lee Feinberg, one of my old teachers. This analysis, I think, is true.

And chapter 10 is the conclusion of this great discussion of Israel’s pollution and of the punishment that is going to be worked out upon them because of their idolatry. In chapter 11, you’ll notice from the very first word – that is, from the very first line – that there is a different spirit from that chapter on, for we read in the first line of chapter 11 we read, “When Israel was a youth, I loved him.” And so, compassion becomes characteristic of the last few chapter of Hosea.

Chapter 10, however, is a great discourse on the need of setting proper priorities before God. What are we really after? It’s good to ask ourselves this question, always. What is our purpose in life as individuals? Prosperity? Happiness? Good Health? It’s obvious a lot of people have that as their primary aim in life in these days. A long life? Success? When we talk about the church of Jesus Christ is it the great crowds, the buildings, the statistics? Are these that are of great concern to us? Are the things that are outward the things that motivate us, or is there something more significant that means something more to us, spiritually?

Listen to David. I think he had a good outlook on life. He said, “One thing I have asked from the Lord, that shall I seek, that I shall dwell in the house of the Lord all of the days of my life.” And then Paul, speaking hundreds of years later in much the same tone says, “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one

thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”

We sometimes like to say that a person who has one aim in life, one goal, one motivating thing in his life is a fanatic. In one sense, that’s probably true. And if our goal is, as we have just mentioned, good health, happiness, success, proper self-esteem, one would be a fanatic if that’s all that he has as his goal in life.

But when we’re talking about the goal of the love and service of the true God, that goal is so big that when a person has that goal as his life, he’s not fanatical. He just has a true view of life as it really is indeed. So, if our goal is big enough, we’re not fanatics.

Well, in the prophet’s sense of course, one may call such a person a madman, because that’s what we saw not long ago: the prophet is a fool; the inspired man is demented. That may be the way the world looks at it, but if our goal is truly the glory of the eternal God, that’s not a madman’s goal. That’s sound mind’s goal.

So, the prophet will talk about the proper priorities here, and as he has been doing, he is exploring the nature of Israel’s departure from the Lord God. And in verse 1 and verse 2, he speaks very movingly and very vividly of prosperity and of divine blessing. One of the Jewish commentators has entitled these verses, “Israel’s misused prosperity.” Well, we can see that Israel does look prosperous, but nevertheless, their prosperity is something that has been misused.

Notice the opening phrases, “Israel is a luxuriant vine.” The Authorized Version renders this word, “empty.” The reason for this different rendering – for they do seem tremendously different – Israel is an empty vine, Israel is a luxuriant vine. One wonders how the translators can translate and come with such different renderings of the Hebrew text. But the reason for it is relatively simple. The Hebrew word *baqaq*, which is found here, is actually a root that has two basic significances. And one of the basis significances is “to be empty.” And in that sense, that root is that which one would use to describe a

gurgling sound. Now out west, of course, you can think of people taking a jar and throwing it over their shoulder and drinking out of it. Well, if you’ll take something like that it will make a gurgling sound.

When I came home Friday night, Martha and I went to a restaurant nearby, because I come home a little late, and so we went right in and sat down in a booth. And there were two couples right behind us. We didn’t know them and they didn’t know us. And one of the men was laughing quite a bit, but unfortunately, his laugh sounded like a gurgling sound. And finally, it got so humorous that I could hardly eat for laughing. When he laughed, and he was laughing all the time. And Martha was trying to look very decorous and dignified [laughter], but even near the end she began to chuckle. And [Johnson laughs] I thought of this particular verb as something that makes a gurgling sound, and the word does mean that. And in that sense, it meant “to be empty.” But the root also meant luxuriant, and so obviously in this passage, that’s the sense of it. Israel is a luxuriant vine, he produces fruit for himself.

So, the vine is growing rampantly, but such a vine is not fruitful. The vine, of course, is an old and familiar figure for the Nation Israel. If you’ll look back at Psalm 80 for example, and the Psalmist there writes, as he offers a prayer to the Lord God to rescue Israel from some of their calamities. In the fourth verse of Psalm 80 the Psalmist writes, “O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt Thou be angry with the prayer of Thy people? Thou hast fed them with bread of tears and Thou hast made them to drink tears in large measure.” And then notice in the 7th verse, “O God of hosts, restore us and cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved.” And then in verse 14, “O God of hosts, turn again, now, we beseech Thee, turn again from heaven and take care of this vine; even the shoot which Thy right hand has planted, and on the Son which Thou hast strengthened for Thyself.” So, Israel in the Old Testament was likened to a vine.

And remember that in the Old Testament in Isaiah chapter 5, the prophet tells a little parable there of how the Lord God has planted a vine, and how he has done

everything for his vine that you could possibly do for his vine. But when the Lord God looked at his vine and sought for the produce for his vine, the kind of thing that you would expect to have, well, he looked, Isaiah says, for judgment, and behold, he found oppression and bloodshed. And he looked for righteousness, and behold, he found a cry.

In the Hebrew text, there’s a great play on words here, and Isaiah writes – and you could almost hear it if you just listen to the Hebrew, *Yhovah qavah mishpat Ybanay mispach*. So he looked for *mishpat*, and instead of *mishpat*, he found *mispach*. And that’s the difference between justice and oppression, or bloodshed. And he looked, *tsdaqah* for righteousness, and instead of righteousness, behold, *tse`aqah*, a cry – the cry that arises from people who are oppressed. And so, looking for *mishpat* he found *mispach*, and looking for *tsdaqah*, he found *tse`aqah*. It’s the disappointment of the Lord God when he looks at his vine and finds that the vine does not have that which it does not have: fruit for himself.

Now you know, of course, that I’m a viticulturalist. And I have three vines. And my vines, believe it or not, do have grapes on them. But I have an interesting vine this year. I have a vine that is just growing all over the wall. It is really just putting out, what shall I say? – vine. Vine and leaves. And really, to find a grape on it is very difficult. You have to pull aside the leaves and finally, on this great big vine – I believe there’s just one little cluster. Whereas on the vine next to it, not nearly so big, not nearly so rampant in its growth, there are quite a few clusters.

Well that’s what God is speaking about here. He says Israel is a luxuriant vine, just growing all over everything. As you look at it, you would think outwardly that it is a vine that is really fruitful. But he cannot find any fruit on it. Israel is a luxuriant vine. He produces fruit for himself. It’s not for the Lord God. He is interested in the things that are displeasing to the Lord God. He is producing the things that are ultimately will lead to their judgment. So a luxuriant vine, but his fruit is for himself, not the Lord God.

You know, the Lord Jesus said in John 15, thinking from the background of this same thing he said, I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. And he goes on to say if you’re going to produce fruit for the Lord God, you must abide in the vine. So, Israel is the vine. But Israel is a luxuriant vine, not producing fruit for God – fruit for himself.

What was Israel’s fruit? Well, he describes it. He says, the more his fruit, the more altars he’s made. The richer his land, the better he built the sacred pillars. So, the fruit of Israel, instead of the fruit of righteousness and instead of the fruit of justice, the fruit of Israel is the altars and obelisks and pillars that are devoted to the worship of the false god.

And so all over the hills of Samaria, you could see the obelisks, those four-squared towers that go up and end with a little pyramid at the top, but they are devoted to the worship of Baal. And the pillars, as he says, and the altars – all of these things all over the hills of Israel where they are to worship the one, true God, the Lord God Jehovah beside whom there is no other god. What fruit.

What has happened to God? What has happened to Yahweh? Well, he’s been lost. He’s been mislaid. He’s been forgotten. So the nation’s mission, which was to bring the knowledge of the Lord God to the nations, has been lost. Their passion has been misdirected. And now, instead of being directed toward the glory of the true God, it is being directed to the glory of the false god and the glory of Israel in the process. And so with their passion and with their purpose lost, they are headed for ultimate judgment.

Now he goes on to say why this is so. He says, “Their heart is faithless.” The Revised Standard Version renders this “faithless” as “false.” One of the commentators has rendered it “tricky.” The word is really a word that means something like “smooth.” Their heart is smooth. And again, in the Authorized Version you have the translation, “Their heart is divided.” But the word itself probably comes from a different root with the same characters in Hebrew in smooth, but smooth in the sense of deceptive and false. As

the Psalmist says in the 55th Psalm and the 25th verse, “His mouth was smoother than butter.”

You ever met any individuals like that? They have a wonderful way of speaking smoothly, and if you’re not on your guard, you’ll be taken in by their deceptiveness, their falsity, their trickiness. And so what he is saying is, their heart is smooth, their heart is false, their heart is tricky; it is divided. In other words, outwardly they are followers of Yahweh, the true God, but really they’re followers of Baal and of their own selves.

One of the commentators, one of the older commentators points out that this word which means smooth was also used of stones because of the smoothness of them, and used for stones in casting lots. Or as we would say, perhaps, in playing with the dice. And so the smooth stones were used with that in view. He goes on to make the application, only an application, that what they were doing was playing dice with the interests of the Lord God. And in fact, the English have an expression about an individual who’s wasting his inheritance in spending it foolishly, “he’s dicing away his inheritance.” And so the thought lying back of this is Israel is gambling with the interests of the Lord God. Their heart is smooth, its tricky, its faithless, its divided. And as a result of that, they’re very displeasing to the Lord God.

What they are interested in is not really an encounter with the Lord God. They are interested in evading him. And yet, all outwardly looks good. They are attending to the feasts. They are attending to the sacrifices. They have the priesthood. The priests are still carrying on their duties. Everything outwardly seems to fine. And in fact, they’re broad-minded because they not only worship the Lord Jehovah, but they also worship the Lord Baal. And in mingling the two, they think they are being broad-minded, whereas they are being very, very displeasing to the Lord God who will not have any one as a God by his side. For to have anyone a god by the side of the Lord God Jehovah is to take from him his glory, and he will not give his glory to another.

When we are broad-minded and say, well, we can go to heaven the way the Bible teaches, or we can go to heaven another way, provided we are religious, we are only depriving God of his glory. We’ve apostasized from the truth of God, and we will only bring ultimate judgment upon ourselves. If there’s anything that angers the Lord God, it is to take his glory and give it to someone else, or to share it with someone else.

So, the prophet has spoken here in the first two verses about prosperity and divine blessing. And now he will talk about pollution and judgment. And it’s very revealing the depth to which Israel has descended. In the third verse, “Surely now they will say, ‘We have no king.’” It’s almost as if they will admit Hoshea was no king at all -- he was just a puppet of Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria – freely admits the reason for the political humiliation is, we do not fear the Lord. And then asks the cynical question in sour grapes, What value is a king? They only make empty covenants. So, the people feel about their kings.

Now we’ve talked about a good bit of this in the reading of the Scriptures. I did that on purpose so that we wouldn’t have to deal with these details. He talks about how he is going to bring them into ultimate judgment, take them into captivity, destroy the Northern Kingdom, and he is also going to destroy the golden calf at Bethel. That’s going into captivity. And furthermore, Samaria’s going to be cut off with her king like a stick on the surface of the water.

When I grew up, I would frequently visit my grandmother in Jasper, Alabama. And just across the street from her house was Town Creek. And one of the nice little things that a kid does when he’s about 7 or 8 or 9 years of age is play around a stream. And so every year I would go down and dam up Town Creek. That was the stream that ran through the little village, and I would have the only dam on it so far as I would know.

I’d build a dam across it and wade in my little thing until finally my dam would give way for some reason or other. But I can remember, and I know you do, too, standing by many a stream and that particular stream and just wandering what would

happen and how far would that little piece of wood go if you put it on the river and then ran down the bank and followed it just to see where it would go. What fun that was.

Well, that’s the figure that Hosea uses here when he says, Samaria will be cut off with her king like a stick on the surface of the water. In other words, the figure is designed to express the helplessness of the king and helplessness of the people, just like a little twig on a stream.

And in fact, he goes on to say, also the high places of iniquity, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed. He’s going to do away with all of those altars and obelisks with look as if they are the secret of the fruitfulness of Israel but actually are their apostasy. Thorns and thistle will grow on their altars, and then they will say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us. This is the last word from Hosea on human arrogance and independence.

This text, incidentally, is cited twice in the New Testament in very interesting places. The Lord Jesus is on his way toward the cross. And women are following him. And he turns to them and speaks to them and says, “Don’t weep for me, women. Weep for others.” And furthermore, he cites this text. It’s in Luke chapter 23 and verse 30. Listen to what he says, “For behold the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed.’ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’”

And the Apostle John, as he gives us the divine Revelation, the book of the apocalypse, in the 6th chapter describes the situation when the day of the wrath of God ultimately comes to earth and the final fulfillment of this is when, in the last days the kings of the earth and the other important men will say to the mountains – they’ll finally have a prayer meeting – finally a prayer meeting. And finally pray to the true God, but it will too late. They will say to the mountains, “Cover us,” and to the hills, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the wrath of the lamb.” So, here’s the Prophet Hosea speaking of that.

He goes on to say in verse 9, from the days of Gibeah (we’ve talked about that) you have sinned O Israel, there they stand. Will not the battle against the sons of iniquity over take them in Gibeah? And then when it is my desire I will chastise him, and the peoples will be gathered against them when they are bound for their double-guilt.

And the last few verses of the chapter give us admonition and appeal. The admonition, in verse 11, verse 13-15, and the appeal in verse 12 where he says, “So, with a view to righteousness, reap in accordance with kindness. Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until he comes to rain righteousness on you.” May I say just a word about this?

There’s one of Hosea’s great texts, this statement: “Break up your fallow ground.” What is fallow ground? We who live in the city may not realize what it is. Fallow ground is ground that is left to lie idle. There’s a benefit to leaving ground to lie idle for a limited period of time. But let us think of a man who has a large farm and his ground lies fallow. If he lets his ground lie fallow for year after year, what happens to the ground? Well, of course, it not only becomes filled with weeds and thistles and thorns and all of the other kinds of things that grow where there is no discipline whatsoever, but it becomes hard and difficult to work.

And so when the prophet says here, “Break up your fallow ground,” well, he’s talking about the fact that Israel has let their land, speaking of themselves – they have left their fields for years without cultivation – and the result is that there are weeds and all of the other kinds of things that make it difficult for anything fruitful to grow, and in addition, it is hard and representative of the nature of the human heart when we do not pay attention to the interests of the Lord God.

You know, we are living in a day that is very strange. We are living in a day in which individuals are very much interested in the body. Isn’t it interesting? The world and the Western world and the United States is tremendously interested in their bodies. Now that’s a legitimate interest provided it’s kept in perspective. It’s important to pay

attention to what you eat. It’s important to pay attention to exercise. It’s important to take care of yourself. We all grant that.

But when our body becomes our supreme concern at the expense of our soul and spirit, then we are in tremendous danger. I think it’s amazing. The jogging craze. You can hardly drive your car. You have to watch for the people who are running on the side of the road. Nothing wrong with that. I hope I don’t ever hit one of them. But you do have to watch. There are so many people who seem to be jogging.

Dr. Pentecost liked to say, “jiggling” instead of “jogging.” [Laughter] But anyway, jogging. We are tremendously interested in our body. We have all kinds of incentives to it. Our newspapers are filled with exhortations to take care of your body. Well, I won’t say anything more about that. I think you understand what it is we’re talking about.

There is of course another part of our being, and that’s our mind. And there are a few people interested in their minds. Not enough. But there are a few people who are interested in their minds, and some are interested in their minds perhaps a little too much. But what is more important? Our body? Our mind? What’s the most important thing? It is not our spirits? Is it not that which is the key to the eternal? Continuation of life in the truest and fullest sense?

Would it not be the part of wisdom to devote all of our energy to seeing that our spirits are healthy? How wrong can we be in our priorities when we are so interested in our body that we neglect our spirit? I think, if you were to look truly at the United States of America, that men in our country spend far more attention on their bodies than they do on their spirits. In fact, their spirit is largely neglected. They do not really spend much time on their spirit at all.

And yet, the prophet writes, “Break up your fallow ground.” You know, there’s an interesting thing about this. If you don’t break up your fallow ground, it’s not a question of surviving in a neutral state as long as you neglect to do what is necessary, someone else will see that the hardness of the ground increases and weeds become

thicker and thicker because Satan is very active. “Break up your fallow ground because it is time to seek the Lord,” so the prophet says. What’s the time? Well, of course, all the time, but most of all when you’re young. Then, when the mind and the spirit seem to be more tender to the things of the Lord God.

Many years ago I listened to a lot of missionaries in a missionary conference in which I was the speaker. About 200 of them were there. And they had just part of the program, one of the mornings was the 200 missionaries lined up and each came were allowed one minute to tell how they came to knowledge of the Lord, how their life began spiritually. And one after another these men, there were a long string of men (and there were ladies, too), they came and they stood behind the pulpit for one minute, they finished, and there really was a tremendous message that came home.

About 90% of them found the Lord when they were children. And about 75% it seemed were the sons and daughters of believing parents. It was very impressive. I don’t know whether that would be the general thing or not, but it was certainly obvious there. They broke up their fallow ground when they were young, when the ground’s not so hard and when the weeds and the thistle are not so heavy and thick.

But, if you’re old, there’s still time, Hosea says. “Break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the LORD until He comes to rain righteousness on you.” So, isn’t it interesting that he would say, break up your fallow ground; it’s time to seek the Lord? Think of that. Seek the Lord? Where do you find the Lord? Well, down in the center of Dallas? In some church? First Baptist Church? Believers Chapel? Well actually, the Lord may be found anywhere, anywhere the heart turns to the Lord. Seek the Lord.

Immediately, people say, well I don’t really think I’m worthy. Hosea says, it’s time to seek the Lord. Or someone says who’s been in Believers Chapel, “I’m not sure that I’m one of the elect.” One of the simplest to find out whether you’re one of the elect or not is to seek the Lord. And if you seek the Lord, you will find him, and you’ll also find you you’re one of the elect. It’s very simple. How foolish can it be to say, I don’t think I’ll

seek the Lord; I don’t know if I’m one of the elect or not. What you’re doing is simply dodging. You’re simply not wanting to seek him.

So, break up your fallow ground, it’s time to seek the Lord. And notice sometimes it may take a little time. He says, Seek the Lord until he comes to reign righteousness on you. I couldn’t help but think, and I read one of the commentators who alluded to this of Elijah on Mt. Carmel. He won his great victory over the prophets of Baal there and then since he’d won his great victory and the drought’s lesson had begun to come home, then he felt that it was time for it to rain.

So he went over and he got down upon his knees, and he prayed. And he had his servant, Gehazi, with him. Now, Gehazi was a good servant and so Elijah said, “Gehazi, go out and see if you see any evidence of the rain.” This is on the top of Mt. Carmel. So Gehazi went out, looked out to the west, looked over the Mediterranean Sea, nothing. Came back to Elijah and said there’s nothing. Elijah’s on his knees praying. Go again. He went out the second time, came back, said there’s nothing. Go again. He went out, there was nothing. Go again. Go again. Go again. I can imagine Gehazi saying, “I wish I was in better condition. [Laughter]

Anyway, he went out and finally he came back and said, “Look, Elijah, there’s a cloud out there, but it’s just a little tiny cloud. It’s just the size of a man’s hand.” And Elijah said, get everything together, go tell Ahab who’s out there to get his chariot down from the mountain because it’s going to get caught in the mud if he doesn’t hurry up. And so the last picture that you have in 1 Kings chapter 18 is of Ahab in his chariot and the rest of the people heading back to the capital in Samaria, and who’s running out in front but the prophet Elijah. He had sought the Lord until God finally gave the rain. You see, sometimes it’s necessary to do that if we really want to have a relationship with the Lord God that counts.

Well, let me conclude for our time is up. The solid test of the life of the church in the individual is really our passion and our purpose. What is our purpose in life? The

whirl of the machinery? To have a successful life? Have a happy, fruitful family? To have a business that pays? Or to have some profession and calling that really challenges us? The multiplication of the obelisks? The manufacture of more and more altars and pillars? The question really that Hosea asks us is, is our heart smooth? Is it divided? Is it tricky? Is it the kind of heart that has a part for the Lord God but not everything? Even Beelzebub with all of his craft cannot stand divided.

There are many things that we can stand together in if we are divided. We don’t have to agree on all the points of the creed if we are true believers in Jesus Christ. We don’t have to agree on all of the understanding of the ordinances that we might have. But if we’re not agreed in heart in relationship with the Lord God, then we shall surely fall. A divided heart in the final analysis is a terrible disease, and even a physician cannot cure a divided heart. The heart is the vital organ.

What are symptoms of a divided heart? Well one of the symptoms is formality in religion. So we come to church on Sunday to go to church. We go to church; that’s a good thing. Go there on Sunday. Formality. As far as our hearts are concerned, not really interested in growing. Not really interested in putting aside some of our interests for the things of the Lord. Not really interested in sacrificing any of our personal interests; we just want to add to it the worship of God and come on Sunday.

Or, perhaps inconsistency. On Sunday, we’re vital and vigorous, but on Monday, you’d never know we were Christians if someone didn’t say, “Are you a Christian?” Well, yes, I am a believer in Christ. If someone mentions politics, we can talk politics. If someone mentions social welfare we can talk about that, or religion, we can talk about religion, but our heart’s not set wholly on the Lord God.

Another sign of course is frivolity in spiritual things. We speak with flippancy. We find little texts of Scripture which we use in order to describe our life and laugh about it. You know, like an individual who is a young man, for example. He has a date with

his sweetheart, and so he says, “I’m going out to do a little personal work.” That kind of thing. Flippancy. That’s not very happy.

The terrible consequences of it of course are fruitlessness, uselessness. Not only that, but we are a danger for the things of the Lord as we go about claiming that we represent the Lord God and we don’t, what kind of message do we give the world? You know, it is a sad thing, and we all are guilty of this. I don’t mean to berate you and suggest that I’m not involved. Let me give you an illustration.

A few years back, there was Christian couple wanted to go into a new business. Had to, as a matter of fact. They went about it very well. They studied a particular business. They thought that was the thing they ought to go into. They contacted a well-known national company. Made arrangements with one of their representatives to go looking for their place. They had some money. They were going to build a building in which they could carry on their business.

So the national representative came. They spent time looking for places. They also then contacted a local Christian who was a real estate man, and so they went out with him looking for particular places to put the store, and finally when the time came, having selected the place, then they contacted the Christian who had been helping them and discovered that it was already sold.

Not only was it already sold, but it was sold to a friend of the Christian real estate agent who had in the meantime contacted the same company through the advice of the real estate agent and they had bought the property. Christian, mind you. Member of one of our evangelical churches – tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ashkelon lest the uncircumcised Philistines of the denominations hear – one of the independent churches in North Dallas. A divided heart. It’s easy for us to have a divided heart. It’s very sad.

That’s the kind of thing Hosea’s talking about. Israel’s filled with that. I have a hunch that we fail – perhaps not so blatantly as that illustration – but we fail, too. Therefore, when the Psalmist says, in his prayer to the Lord God, “Unite my heart to fear

Thy name O Lord,” that’s what I want to pray. O Lord. Unite my heart to fear Thy name. Give me proper priorities in life. May God, I have, like Israel did not have, proper goals. Proper aims in life.

And if you’re a young person and you have not yet come to know the Lord God, may you seek him until he reigns righteousness upon you and justifies you through the saving work of Jesus Christ. And if you’re old and you have missed that, there’s still time. Come to him. Seek him. It’s time to seek the Lord now and seek him until he reigns righteousness upon you, too, for he surely will.

I you’re here today and you’ve never believed in Christ, we invite you to come to him who’s offered the atoning sacrifice. Don’t leave this auditorium without that solid trust in him, and may God give us to have an undivided heart for his glory. Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are so grateful to Thee for these exhortations from the Prophet Hosea, for he truly speaks to our condition. Forgive our tricky, deceitful, divided and smooth hearts. Deliver us from the luxuriousness of seeking things that do not matter. O God, give us fruit for Thee.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.