

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

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Craving for False Gods

[Hosea Series, Part 14]

July 10, 2022

Sermon Text: Hosea 10

Scripture Reading: Matthew
13:18-23

Follow along as I read this 10th
chapter of the minor prophet,
Hosea:

Hos 10:1-15 Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. **The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars.** (2) Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.

(3) For now they will say: “We have no king, for we do not fear the

LORD; and a king—what could he do for us?”

(4) **They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants;** so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.

(5) The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-aven. Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests— those who rejoiced over it and over its glory— for it has departed from them. (6) The thing itself shall be carried to Assyria as tribute to the great king. Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.

(7) Samaria's king shall perish like a twig on the face of the waters. (8) The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. **Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, “Cover us,” and to**

the hills, “Fall on us.”

(9) From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah? (10) When I please, I will discipline them, and nations shall be gathered against them when they are bound up for their double iniquity.

(11) Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck; but I will put Ephraim to the yoke; Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow for himself.

(12) Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.
(13) You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice; you have eaten the fruit of lies.

Because you have trusted in your own way and in the multitude of your warriors, (14) therefore the tumult of war shall arise among

your people, and all your fortresses shall be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle; mothers were dashed in pieces with their children. (15) Thus it shall be done to you, O Bethel, because of your great evil. At dawn the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off.

It is no secret that our own nation has been pursuing increasing wickedness for decades. Evil has been and is on the rise. Millions of murdered babies, evil perversions of marriage, family, and human sexuality. Exclusion of God from about every institution of the nation. And the list goes on. It grows longer. Ahab and Jezebel rule.

There is a remnant. The Lord always keeps His own, and there are others who still have some semblance of morality and righteousness.

It was even worse in Hosea’s day. Here were the people raised up by the Lord to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation – and now they were

ripe for judgment. Hardly one righteous person could be found in this Northern kingdom of Israel. Soon the Lord would call the Assyrians to swoop down and destroy the entire nation – but the people would still not heed Hosea’s warnings. They clung to their false calf god, all the while playing the hypocrite and mouthing supposed allegiance to the Lord.

We have seen that under Israel’s evil king, Jeroboam II, there was great prosperity in the nation. Military victories, expansion of territory, a strong economy. And yet – *the more blessings they enjoyed, the more idols they worshipped.* Listen again to it:

10:1 Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. **The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars.** (2) Their heart is false; now they must bear their guilt. The LORD will break down their altars and destroy their pillars.

“Pillars” refers to idolatrous structures. They filled the land.

Thankfulness is not a fruit of the unconverted heart. Times of God’s blessing, times of prosperity, do not historically lead a nation to a turning to Christ. This is true individually and as a nation. “God Bless America” is not necessarily the most fitting prayer for our day.

The sinner’s heart is, as has been said, an idol factory. And the principal seen in Israel is clearly stated by Hosea – *the more the sinner enjoys peace and prosperity, the more he turns away from the Lord to false gods of his own making. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built.*

This evil pattern in the sinner is only going to be ended on that Day when Christ returns:

Isa 17:7-8 In that day man will look to his Maker, and his eyes will look on the Holy One of Israel. (8) He will not look to the altars, the work of his hands, and he will not look on what his own fingers have

made, either the Asherim or the altars of incense.

Note, It is a great affront to God, and an abuse of his goodness, when the more mercies we receive from him the more sins we commit against him, and when the more wealth men have the more mischief they do. Should not we be thus abundant in the service of our God, as they were in the service of their idols? As we find our estates increasing, we should proportionably abound the more in works of piety and charity.

[Matthew Henry]

As people of the Lord, as citizens of His kingdom now, let's be certain that we are in no way guilty of unthankfulness when the Lord blesses us. People with new hearts, people of the New Creation, respond to God's blessings with praise and thanksgiving. We are not of this evil world – so let's not be conformed to it.

Look at still another aspect of Hosea's day:

(4) They utter mere words; with empty oaths they make covenants; so judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.

Israel was consistently “religious.” There are many people in our day as well (though the number seems to have dwindled) whose religion is only a matter of talk. Their heart remains unconverted. They utter mere words when they pray. They make empty oaths, taking the Lord's name in vain as they swear to some baptismal formula, or take the Lord's table, or swear to a church membership covenant. They do not know the Lord. Their religion is entirely external. This is the thing that Hosea denounced and exposed.

Notice how seriously the Lord regards such hypocrisy. These kinds of people are like poisonous weeds in the Lord's field. *And they incite His anger and judgment.*

Isa 1:10-15 Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you

people of Gomorrah! (11) “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. (12) “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? (13) Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. (14) Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. (15) When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

We must be born again! I grew up in false Christianity – in this very kind of counterfeit outward appearance which was devoid of the Holy Spirit – devoid of Christ. I have seen its effects and the evil fruit that it produces for

generations. Don’t you be guilty of it. *Know the Lord!* If you have any doubts, then the greatest need in your life is to ask the Lord to show you the real condition of your heart. Today!

Look further now:

(7) Samaria's king shall perish like a twig on the face of the waters. (8) The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. **Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, “Cover us,” and to the hills, “Fall on us.”**

Thorn and thistle. Just about every time – perhaps even *every time* – you come across these words in Scripture, you should immediately think – “the curse.”

Gen 3:17-18 And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; (18) thorns

and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

Israel's land was to be a place of blessing. Flowing with milk and honey. A place of fruitfulness. It was to be a reminder of Eden and a picture of the coming New Creation in Christ. But what happened? The same thing that happened in Eden – curse due to sin. Thorns and thistles. Creation gone wrong. Sin – there is the real blight on this earth. Israel, just like man today, insisted on his idols. He will not bow to the Lord. So the curse continues to come upon him.

To show you even more plainly just how hard the sinner's heart is (and thus why salvation is entirely of the Lord), just look again at these words:

Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, "Cover us," and to the hills, "Fall on us."

Do those words sound familiar to you? Look here at some other occurrences:

Isa 2:19-21 And people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth. (20) In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, (21) to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the LORD, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

Rev 6:15-17 Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, (16) calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17)

for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

The judgment coming upon Israel that Hosea was warning of serves as a type, as a prophetic picture of the final coming of Christ in that great Day of judgment. The great day of His wrath.

Now, notice very carefully and soberly what this tells us. Here are people, sinners who have continued to hate and reject Christ, who KNOW that Christ is coming again, who know that the Lord is the Creator, who know that they owe Him alone their thanksgiving and worship, and yet *even on that Day when He comes, they will not repent of their sin and idolatry.* They want the rocks and mountains and caves to cover them over, to hide them, so that in some last ditch futile effort they attempt to escape His notice.

Also notice again these words in Isaiah 2 –

(20) In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their

idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, (21) to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs,

It seems that in the Day of the Lord, the wicked will be forced to realize that their false gods and idols have no power to rescue them. They cast them away. Yet they will not repent – in fact it will be too late then to repent.

Notice particularly in the Revelation passage *that this sin infects every single kind of person outside of Christ. Rich, poor, nobility, slave, free, commoner, across all nations and races – all are infested with sin, all insist on worshipping creations of their own hands, and all refuse to bow their knee to Christ.* This is what is wrong with our world. It is what was wrong with us the moment we were born. Sin. It is the root of all our problems, of all the evils in this world. And there is only one remedy which the mass of mankind refuses to yield to.

Let's look at just one more important principle in this chapter (though there are many more) –

(12) Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the LORD, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.
(13) You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice; you have eaten the fruit of lies.

Sowing and reaping. This is a recurring and vital theme in the Bible:

Gal 6:7-8 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. (8) For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

Also see Jer 4:3-4 and the parable of the sower which we read earlier in Matthew 13.

What does it mean to “break up

your fallow ground”? The Bible is filled with pictures taken from agriculture, and that is what we have here. Fallow ground is uncultivated ground filled with weeds. Farmers will intentionally leave a field “fallow” for a year or so in order to rejuvenate the soil. Sometimes they will plant some kind of crop on it that replaces nutrients (I think for instance that alfalfa does this).

Here however it seems that Hosea's emphasis is on fields that have long been neglected. These fields are, in fact, the fields of men's hearts.

Now, the imagery here is that *these fallow fields have in fact been being plowed and sown!* The problem is that the seed sown was bad seed:

- Iniquity
- Lies

And as a result, the only fruit produced was evil that just increased the evil in the land. The bountiful promised Land only

produced the curse – thorns and thistles. Evil and sin.

So the Lord, in this picture of breaking up fallow ground, is calling the nation to repentance. To a turning from evil to embracing righteousness. If they will repent, *the Lord promises to rain a harvest of righteousness upon them.* Injustice and evil will be defeated.

In our day, in our nation and also individually, we see fallow ground producing nothing but evil crops of the curse. Hard, unrepentant hearts gone to weed.

And make no mistake, this sowing of bad seed is producing harvests of bad fruit.

Listen to Paul again:

Gal 6:7-8 Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. (8) For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

The sinner really thinks that he or she can mock God with impunity. That they can sow all the bad seed they want and reap a bountiful harvest of good things. But the principle here is inviolable. It cannot be broken. *We reap what we sow.* If I sow sin, I will reap the evil consequences, ending in hell. If I sow in my life faith in Christ, obedience to the Lord, following the leading of the Spirit, I will reap a harvest of eternal life.

Have you noticed this stony hardness of fallow heart-soil? The sinner will be reaping the harvest of his sin. These evil crops take many forms:

- Families imploding
- Children one after the other pursuing sin
- Lying in a gutter someplace enslaved to drugs and alcohol
- Emptiness of soul and contemplation of suicide
- Others perhaps in prison

Harvests of bad seed sown, you see. Repentance, a turning to Christ, a breaking up of the thorn-

filled fallow ground of the heart, is what is necessary to turn this all around. But the sinner simply will not. I we can go further, *the sinner will not because left to himself, he cannot. He is a slave to his sin.*

because of the great love with which he loved us, (5) even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Now, let's conclude with this: *If you know Christ today, do not boast. There is nothing for us to boast about. Salvation is of the Lord. The only reason anyone comes to faith in Christ and repentance is entirely because of the mercy and grace of the Lord. His Spirit came to us and broke up the hard, weed-filled barren field of our heart. We were born again.*

Eph 2:1-5 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins (2) in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— (3) among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. (4) But God, being rich in mercy,