
Prayers

To God

Give thanks to God for the beauty of His world and for everything that reminds you of this today, perhaps some music, perhaps the scenery, perhaps the love of a friend. Look out for the evidence of God within the world and give thanks to the Father for His presence.

For myself

Weekly theme: personal honesty

Forgive me for every minute of this day when I have failed to live according to Your ways, O Lord. And by Your grace, remind me when I fall short of the best standards of Christian discipleship. May I live for You and die to self, and in so doing gain the prize of eternal life. All praise and thanks to You, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour; You have shown me the Way! AMEN

For others

Pray for your minister and your church; pray for its mid week activities and its work amongst people in your neighbourhood who do not necessarily go to church.

Meditation

What seems so glorious now will never lead you heavenward;
So let the Spirit lead you to where He will give you life.

Forsake wealth, it pledges much, but consumes the weaker soul;
Accept such poverty as leaves you free to find salvation!

Forsake status, it saps the human heart of honesty and warmth;
Accept the lowest role so God can shape you as He will!

Forsake power, it tempts the strong to trust in strength and force;
Accept your weaknesses, and trust in His empowering love.

Forsake success, it traps you into thinking that you have achieved;
Accept that loosing often marks the spot where new things start.

And if you did not think that God had come to turn the world around,
You may just find that when He does, true life can really begin!

Bible Passage

Hosea 6:7-11

- ⁷ *Like Adam, they have broken the covenant
they were faithless to me there.*
- ⁸ *Gilead is a city of wicked men,
stained with footprints of blood.*
- ⁹ *As prowlers lie in ambush for a man,
so the priests band together;
they murder on the road to Shechem,
committing shameful crimes.*
- ¹⁰ *I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel.
There, Ephraim is given to prostitution
and Israel is defiled.*
- ¹¹ *Moreover, a harvest is appointed for you, Judah,
when I restore the fortunes of my people ...*

Review

Yesterday, we read a wonderful prophecy of Hosea (6:1-3), concerning the precious healing promises of God both to the people of ancient Israel and to Christians today. Hosea may have said this out of exasperation because the people of Israel were not trusting in God or living the life of faith, but that does not mean to say his prophetic words of hope and healing are not a true 'Word of God'. How sad it is therefore, to continue today by reading more of Hosea's prophesies of gloom! Yet again, the Lord God has to speak to His people about sins and their consequences (6:7-11).

One thing is becoming clear to us, in speaking out as he does, Hosea draws out the full meaning of sin against God and its consequences. Even today, his prophecies speak to us about the sins that afflict those who live in a covenant relationship with God. Specifically, the problems of Israel in the Old Testament are a warning to the church. We have a new covenant relationship with God through Christ which contains all the answers to the human condition of sin, it highlights God's eternal love and explains that our access to God comes through Christ alone, who has died as a sacrifice for our sins. However, there is no disputing the fact that as long as we live in a world of sin, our salvation is not yet complete and we remain subject to the power of sin. Christians today are still prone to the same sins and evils as their forefathers; we like to think that we are not, but we are.

Here in this passage, Hosea's prophecy talks about the broken covenant relationship between humanity and God. The interesting feature of what he says comes at the beginning of verse 7, where he says, '*Like Adam, they have broken the covenant ...*' (6:7). Of course, he speaks of the sin of Adam written about in Genesis (Gen 3), and this refers not just to the waywardness of God's chosen people Israel, but to the sinfulness of all people. 'Adam' is the forefather of all, not just the Israelites. There is some debate amongst scholars about whether this is what Hosea's prophecy means here, or whether there was a place named 'Adam' within northern Israel, and the translation of the verse should begin, '*At Adam ...*' and not '*like Adam ...*'. I mention this because your own Bible may have this translation (see also Joshua 3:16).

However, I remain convinced that Hosea's point here remains that all are 'fallen', and are therefore 'like Adam' (6:7). Yet again, Hosea's message points forward to the theology of Paul, who writes '*all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*' (Romans 3:10,11, quoting Psalm 14). In the church today, we should be careful lest we allow our enthusiasm for the Gospel blind us to true nature of the sin all around us. We must deal with the sin that still binds us in our humanity, and not merely strive to be perfect as if we can achieve this by our own efforts, even after we are 'saved'. The wisest Christian knows that the sins of Adam must still be fought; John warns us of exactly this in his first letter (see 1 John 1), and urges all Christians to be serious about the confession of sin.

In the next few verses (6:8-9), Hosea complains about a place called Gilead, he says '*Gilead is a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood*'. He continues, identifying further wickedness, talking of prowlers who '*lie in wait*', priests who '*band together*' for '*murder on the way to Shechem*'. It sounds like the introduction to a crime serial! But what does this mean, and what links Gilead and Shechem?

With these prophecies, Hosea brings together a series of troubled events from Israel's past, each of them having caused strife and division within Israel for centuries after they were committed. Firstly, it was Joseph's brothers who plotted in the regions of Gilead (Gen 37:25) to rid themselves of their precocious but godly younger brother; they planned to kill him but sold the boy instead to Ishmaelite traders (Gen 37) and faked his blood to persuade Jacob that his favoured son was dead. Secondly, Gilead was where the young King Saul first found fame, defending the people there against the Ammonites (1 Samuel 11). From that day onwards, the people of Gilead supported Saul, even against King David, becoming a place of rebellion against the greatest King of all Israel (2 Samuel 17:26, 21:12).

We then come to Hosea's mention of Shechem (6:9). Shechem was the name of a Canaanite man who attempted to marry into Jacob's family by raping Jacob's daughter Dinah (Genesis 34). His actions enraged her brothers, notably Simeon and Levi, who slaughtered the inhabitants of Shechem's home town as a consequence. Then, in the days after Jeroboam led a revolt against king Solomon's son Rehoboam in Jerusalem, the breakaway Israelites built an alternative capital to Jerusalem at a place called 'Shechem' (1 Kings 12:1,25)

All in all, Gilead and Shechem represent places of division and rebellion against God's will. All the events I have mentioned above would have been more like 'recent history' to the people of Hosea's day, and the connections with wickedness, priests and murder (6:9) were well known. But we need reminding of these connections now to make sense of Hosea. He was obviously horrified at the divisions of Israel and their worship of various gods, and we must surely agree that the divided nature of the church today simply continues this awful legacy of the Old Testament. As Hosea says, the anger and division between God's people is a '*horrible thing*' (6:10).

Mostly, Christians today seem happy to live with a degree of division in their midst and perhaps even sin; some will even joke that if Jesus came today, He would not know what church to attend! We should be careful with such matters, because the sin of division and strife is abhorrent to God, as is clear from these prophecies. Hosea's words come from the heart of a man who desperately wanted God's people to turn back to the God they first knew, and he was intolerant of the sins and divisions he saw amongst God's people in his day. We therefore should be very careful lest by tolerating such things and accepting the divisions that separate Christians today, we are found wanting in God's eyes.

In the last verse of our reading, Hosea insists that God will reap His harvest, and consistent with his previous prophecies, he foresees that this will come through God's people Judah. He says, '*a harvest is appointed for you, Judah, when I would restore the fortunes of my*

people' (6:11). God never loses sight of His ultimate purposes, and He never backs down from His righteousness and just judgement of the human condition.

Discipleship

Application

A harvest for God

In the midst of all the difficulties of living the Christian life today, we must never lose a sense of the ultimate victory of Christ and the eternal purposes of God. Without this, Christian faith has no perspective, and we are doomed to repeat the sins of our generation without rising above it. The prophecy of Hosea warns us to stand clear of the ever present sins all around us, and place our hope completely in the providential will of God. It is only when we begin to have the same horror at the sins of our own age as Hosea showed at the sins of Israel that we begin to demonstrate serious intent as Christ's disciples. That does not mean tolerating them or understanding them, it means exposing them and getting rid of them wherever possible. This can seem an impossible task, but unless we believe that in Christ's strength it is possible, we are not truly living the Gospel.

Studying the Old Testament prophets

The more I read the Old Testament and study it, the more I find that the various references within the prophets make sense and add to our understanding of the passages. If you read prophecies like Hosea and Amos, then you will find a multitude of references to places and events, most of which seem incidental. But where we have specific historic references, these can be helpful and potentially informative, and we need to take the time to look up what we can know from the Bible, and even use the internet to find out more, to explore the text thoroughly. Without this, many Old Testament passages like this can just go over our heads!

Ideas for what to do

- When have you been deeply affected by something that has happened in the church that you feel is wrong, yet it has never been dealt with? How can we deal with things better in the life of the church, and sort out what is right and wrong before God?
- Track yourself over a week, and write down the things you think of as 'sins', which you have committed. Keep this private, of course, but use it as a means of asking the Lord for the forgiveness of your sins at the end of the week.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. In what ways do Christians behave 'like Adam' today, and how can we best deal with this in the life of the church?
2. What does this passage of Old Testament prophecy teach us about the sins of God's people today, especially about their divisions?
3. How will God bring a harvest out of His people today, and how can we have confidence that God will do what He says?

Final Prayer

Speak to us, dear Jesus, in the storms of life and in the calm of rest; and lead us through the trials we experience by the comfort, power, love and strength of the Holy Spirit. May we hear Your word of encouragement crystal clear, and may we follow the Spirit's leading step by step, to prove our faith to all and take the eternal prize of life! AMEN
