

March 2, 2025

Return: Have We Forgotten God?

Hosea 10:1-8

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...Some of you have been on a mission trip before. I have been on a few trips with many in this room to Haiti and Honduras. Usually, when the group gets back from a mission's trip, they are often called on to give a report from the trip. And a common theme or refrain from anyone who has been is that they can't believe how the people who live in these countries live on so little and yet have joy and contentment that we, who have so much, do not have. [more]

On one of our trips to Honduras several years back, I remember our group was invited over to one of the local churches for dinner. And while we were eating, a young woman came into the church holding her child who was very sick and was asking for the pastor. The pastor excused himself and met with the woman, prayed over the child and then they left. We didn't know any of this was going on until he told us afterward, and it got me thinking, how often we leave God out of the equation and wonder why God isn't blessing us as we think he should? This woman had no access to a pharmacy to get medicine and no access to a doctor because there is no healthcare available to the poor in Honduras and so she did the only thing she knew to do, look to God and ask him to do what only he can do.

All of us have been in that same situation. And typically, when either we're sick ourselves, or our child is sick, the first thing we do go to the medicine cabinet. If that doesn't work, we then might call to the doctor. And if the doctor can't help and it gets bad enough then we pray and seek the Lord. Now, I'm not saying that medicine or doctors are bad and we shouldn't go to them, in fact we praise God for Doctors and modern medicine and that fact that God has given us these amazing gifts and we live in a country where we can make use of them. But, just as then, when I saw that woman bring her child into the church for prayer, I am reminded again and want to challenge us this morning with this question, "Have we forgotten God?" Do we go through our daily lives without giving much thought to him and what he has done for us? Do we only come to the Lord when we've exhausted all other avenues of "help" and he's then our last resort? Or do we involve him in every circumstance from the very beginning?

We come now in our study of the minor prophets to Hosea ch. 10. For all the signs of impending doom, the people of Israel were seemingly unaware of the imminent judgment of God which would remove them from the land God had given them never to return. The reason for their blindness to this reality was the prosperity that they had so long enjoyed. They became apathetic towards God's blessings, taking them for granted, and worse, began to give credit for all their blessings to the false gods Baal and Asherah. In the midst of all their prosperity, they had forgotten the God who had given it all to them. And God addresses this through his prophet Hosea in our passage today. If you are able, please stand with me as I read the word of God from Hosea 10:1-8. [Read]

Now, right off the bat, in vs. 1, Israel is described as a "luxuriant vine that yields its fruit." When I think of vines, it reminds me of growing up in Georgia and the kudzu vines that were everywhere. Now, when controlled and used properly, kudzu can be used for all kinds of medicinal purposes to treat things like diabetes, cardio vascular problems and fevers. But in the 1930's it was pushed in the US for soil and erosion control, which it did a good job of doing, but an unintended consequence of this invasive plant is that it takes over everything and destroys all other native plant life around it. And this is an exact picture of what Israel had become. Israel used all of its success and prosperity for its own selfish benefit. [Read the rest of vs. 1] Instead of living with thanks to God for his blessings, the people forgot him. And that's similar to how it is today with the prosperous nations of the West, including our own. Despite our Christian heritage, we, as a nation, have taken all the material blessings God has given us and, for the most part, have been blinded to our own sin and rebellion against God by our prosperity.

You see, this vine imagery is found throughout scripture. One thing about a vine is that the purpose of the vine is to produce fruit for its owner. Israel is pictured here as the vine. God planted Israel in the land of Promise and therefore Israel was to produce fruit for him. They were supposed to be a blessing to the other nations, a city on a hill, welcoming to the outsider and to be an example and to teach the ways of God. But they failed miserably. And it's the same with us, as his followers, today. God has called us and planted us in order to bear fruit. This includes every area of life: work, school, our families, etc. So we have this challenge to bear fruit just as Israel had this challenge to bear fruit.

Another thing to understand about a vine is that when a vine does not bear fruit, the owner has one of two choices. He can uproot and destroy the vine because it's dead, or he can solve the vine's problem which we read about today in our NT Reading from John 15. Now the destruction of the branches is talking about unbelievers who reject God's invitation of salvation. But what about those who are God's true children by faith?

That's where the second option comes in, the pruning and cutting out of things that aren't helpful to the life of the plant. God says one way or another I'm going to get you to bear fruit. It may hurt, we may not feel good when he cuts this stuff out of our life, but that's how he gets us to bear fruit again. He is the vinedresser. And this is what's going on in Hosea ch. 10. The very things that they were trusting in, the idols they had set up to worship, would all be stripped away either in the judgment of destruction for the unrepentant unbeliever or in the judgment of pruning and cutting away that would cause true Israel to return and realign with the Lord and bear good fruit once again.

Starting with his picture of Israel as an abundant yet unprofitable vine, the prophet then turns to Israel's arrogance toward God-given authority in vs. 3. Israel appears to have celebrated their freedom from God and any God-given authority. The reason for their failure in leadership, and think of all their wicked kings, was their irreverent attitude toward God.

When we think about the foolish stubbornness of Israel in Hosea's day, we think how could a once-virtuous people be reduced to such a shameful condition? The answer is found in vs. 4. [Read]

Now, Hosea is referring to a specific instance that has led them to the brink of war with the Assyrians. We read about this in 2 Kings 17. "But the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea, who had sent messengers to the king of Egypt and had offered no

tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year; so the king of Assyria shut him up and bound him in prison.” In other words, what had happened was that the northern kingdom had made a deal with Assyria to save them, their first mistake in the process, because they were looking to other nations for help and not God. But when the going got rough and they thought they could get out of their covenant they made with Assyria, they made another deal by aligning themselves with Egypt. This was the final act that led the Assyrians to destroy the northern kingdom in 722BC. So the event of covenant breaking was, ironically enough, the very event that caused the fall of the kingdom.

Hosea’s point is that this attitude pervaded Israel’s relationships of all kinds. It resulted in a society in which everyone was out for themselves. They made promises easily, with little intention of keeping them, and therefore with little trust in the promises of others. This is not any different than our society today, which means the value of integrity on the part of genuine believers is great. If there is a person whose simple word should be trusted, and who’s handshake should be treated as a legal contract, it is the follower of Jesus. For Jesus said himself in his sermon on the mount when considering oaths, “Let your yes be yes and your no be no.”

So vs. 4 is talking about the people of God making a deal and then turning around and forgetting it. And so what does he say, then, is the result, “And judgment sprouts like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.” Now look, it should be obvious, but still it needs to be said, we were reminded last week by Pastor Bruce who shared with us from Hosea ch. 8, you reap what you sow. If you sow the seeds of dishonesty you get the plants. It’s a very simple truth you can learn in your own garden. If you plant poisonous seeds you’ll get poisonous plants. And so if you make great promises but you don’t keep the promises then you get poisonous judgment. See the motif continuing here: you prepare the ground, you make your furrows, you plant your seeds, you fertilize the ground, you water the ground and you want something good to come out of it. You want something you can eat. But you get something poisonous. Why? Because you sowed poisonous seed. All right, so God says, because of this, now judgment is on the way.

The final section of this passage, vs. 5-8, reveals the vine-turned-weed as being trampled and destroyed in the judgment of God. Hosea begins by turning to the nation’s most celebrated monument, the golden calf at Bethel (here, renamed “Beth-aven,” meaning “house of wickedness or destruction”). The prophet points out the dismay that this loss would work in the people’s hearts (Hos 10:5).

It’s interesting that it says, “The inhabitants of Samaria will fear *For* the calf of Beth-aven.” He’s not talking about fearing a god and having respect for him; here he’s saying you’re going to be afraid that someone might carry your god away. He’s being sarcastic here. He’s saying the little calves that you made and that mean so much to you are supposed to protect you right? You’re going to be afraid you won’t be able to protect your god. So this is a little reversal in the mentality that has occurred here. They are so far gone that they’ve reversed the role of man and the god. He says that’s the story of your life and the day is coming when you are going to get so upset that the only thing you can think of day and night is we’ve got to protect the idol.

This might hit a little to close to home, I know it does for me. What is that one thing, or maybe multiple things, that you know is standing between you and a right relationship

with God? And you know that it will be painful to get rid of it, and if your honest, you really don't want to but you know that you should. And we make all the excuses in the world to protect that idol because we don't want to lose it. Whatever that is in your life, and my life, we need to surrender it now, repent, and return to the Lord so that we can bear the good fruit that he desires and not fruit for our own selfish gains.

In vs. 6, we find the description of the literal idol itself, the golden calf, will be carried off to Assyria, and here Hosea really gets sarcastic. The word “carried” here refers to a parade. He’s picturing a big parade going on in Assyria and at the head of the parade is their idols. “As tribute to the great king,” referring to the king of Assyria, the king they didn’t send their tribute to in 2 Kgs 17:4. Hosea is saying, “Remember, you made a deal with the Assyrian king and you said you would pay tribute money, then you broke the deal, so guess what’s going to be used to pay him off? Your precious idols, that’s what’s going to be used to pay him off. God has a way of getting His point across, doesn't he?”

“Ephraim shall be put to shame and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol.” You know what that’s describing? Embarrassment, they’re embarrassed that they projected all this glory and worship onto this idol and then when the glory was gone and they realized it was all for nothing, that’s an embarrassing situation. You put all your stock in this thing that was empty and now you have to walk down the street in this Assyrian parade.

Hosea concludes by describing the final judgment that God would inflict on the northern kingdom in vs. 7-8. While the agency of this destruction would be the Assyrian king, it was God's hand that was at work. So great would be their lament that Hosea uses language later employed for the dismay of the condemned in the final judgment when Jesus returns in Rev. 6. After saying that their king would perish, things would be so bad that the people would literally call for the mountains to fall down on them.

Now, this was surely bad news for Israel, news that they continued to ignore until the actual events of God's judgment on them occurred. But there is always hope. Remember, I said at the beginning of this series that although God was pronouncing his judgment on his people for their sin and rejection, he did not leave them without hope. The prophet has repeatedly offered hope in a return to true faith and a casting off of sin as we have read about the last few weeks in Hosea 6:1, “Come, let us return the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up.” The offer remains open today to be cleansed by Jesus’ atoning blood, through faith in what he accomplished on the cross.

Have you forgotten God? Have you turned to other things for help or comfort and forgotten about the God who made you? Don't be blinded by the comforts of this life and not turn to the God who loves you and gave himself up for you. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5) Let's pray and prepare our hearts for the table of the Lord.