

Explore the Bible: The Sin Harvested

October 17, 2022

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Oct. 30 focuses on Hosea 10:5-15.*

Though the prophet may be the spokesperson, Hosea 9-10 is full of clear and direct words from God. God is speaking the truth to his people, no matter how heavy that truth may be.

God tells the people their sins were many.

First, they worshipped other gods and idols. Repeated throughout Hosea is “adultery” used as metaphor for idolatry. Though in covenant with God, the people the promise of undivided loyalty to Yahweh when they worshipped other gods.

Second, the people selected kings God did not call.

Third, Israel looked to great buildings and militaristic power instead of relying on God for safekeeping. They, too, built fortifications and palaces forgetting again the promises of God.

These are but three examples of the ways in which the people with whom God was in covenant relationship rejected him and his commands.

Throughout the prophets in general, God speaks the truth plainly. Speaking through the prophet, God makes clear the sins of the people. In other words, when it comes to the people’s lack of love for God and others, there is no skirting around the point.

Judgment not the final word

It may seem as though God is shouting in these passages. Reading the prophetic books may evoke the thought that God is only concerned with judgment and not mercy. However, loudness and judgment are not the final points of the prophets in general or Hosea in particular.

Being clear about our lack faithfulness is truly a means to an end, a gracious end. We cannot come back to God if we do not know we need to, and we'd struggle to stay if we are not aware of what keeps us from him. We cannot love others better if we do not know where we are lacking in the fruit of the spirit.

James Baldwin said the reason he could criticize America was because he loved it. He wanted the best for his country, so he could point out what was keeping America from a more just way of life.

God points out our loving other gods or ideologies and lack of love for other people *because* he loves us. Clarity of waywardness does not make God cruel and unkind but loving and hopeful.

What could have been

God makes clear the people's past sins, but he also explains what *could* have been.

God could have put a yoke around them, so they could have had a more fruitful future. They could do good and godly work. This message is for Ephraim, Judah and Jacob. This message is for all God's people.

Here the prophet will use harvest metaphors (e.g. sow, reap, and break up the ground). God would "[come] and [shower] his righteousness on you" (10:12). Before, though, the people the people would need to do the work of

right worship and living.

These few verses of ‘what could have been’ could still be read, however, as a “what can be.” It might seem like God is entirely despondent with the people, but the context for the prophetic books is always hope. The people may be (and have been for a long time) far from God, it is always appropriate “time to seek the Lord” (10:12).

However, since Israel rejected this hopeful future by rejecting the Lord, God sent Assyria. The things Israel had put their trust in, their idols and militaries, would go away.

Where do we place our trust?

Part of Israel’s ultimate sin is that they put their trust in what was not God. They put their trust in idols and in military might to save them. Though we may not have golden calves we carry around with us, we might put our trust in ideologies, other religions, personality tests and other people to such an extent that we do not listen for God’s honest word. We may focus our energy and find our meaning in other people and things to such an extent that they become our god, guiding our lives and serving as the source of our strength.

We live in nations that need armies. We live in a world with war. Pacifism is not the answer to violence in a fallen world. However, the answer to a world with violence is not war, either. Though we need militaries in this world, they are not what (or better yet, who) we should put our trust in. They provide necessary temporal protection, but are not the ultimate answer to sin, violence, and death. The answer to a world with random and unthinkable violence is a Lord who suffered, died, and defeated death.

The point for Ephraim, Judah, Jacob and us is trust. The point all along was that we would put our trust in God. And we can. We can put our trust in the

God, who is not only the Almighty but Immanuel.

God is revealed is not only the one with eternal power but with eternal love. Hope, which is always the point, is found in the one who speaks the truth so that we might return. Though we may only see it in retrospect, if we put our trust in God, he is “mighty to save.”

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