

Hosea 10

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[0 : 00] in his faith. That was to the council. Now as we turn to this tenth chapter in Hosea, as we mentioned last Wednesday, we have moved far now beyond the mere illustration of Hosea and his unfaithful wife, Gomer. We are now talking about what was in Hosea's day the contemporary situation in northern Israel, where the last of the kings of northern Israel, the breakaway kingdom, had attempted, first of all, to make peace with the king of Assyria, the superpower in the world at the time, and then decided to rebel against it and receive the inevitable reward of that. But the hopelessness of Israel is not because they are political minnows. It is rather because they have forsaken the living God.

When they were even a tiny kingdom, they still managed to defeat the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the forces of Syria based in Damascus. They could beat the Egyptians crossing the Red Sea. They could do anything when they were dependent upon the Lord.

However politically tiny and weak they ought to have been. When they were weak but trusted in the Lord, they were strong. What Hosea now is commenting upon in this chapter is the situation in northern Israel with the shadow that it casts southward into Judah, who don't appear to be learning the lessons of it, that forsaking the Lord brings its own disaster upon it. Israel is an empty vine. He bringeth forth fruit unto himself. According to the multitude of his fruit, he hath increased the altars. According to the goodness of his land, they made goodly images. God gave to Israel a land flowing with milk and honey. But once he became settled in it, once he became to a certain degree prosperous, that is always the speech.

When men and nations begin to think, I have much roots laid up for many years, I don't need anything now of the Lord, I don't need to be dependent asking God for my daily breath, I don't need to wait on him, I have moved beyond that speech.

[2 : 21] I am now more self-sufficient. I, myself, have achieved these things. I have graduated beyond, matured beyond the primitive religious superstition of my parents, grandparents, forebears, generation.

And so in believing himself strong and wealthy and powerful, he becomes emptied like a vine to whom one comes as Jesus came to the fig tree, remember, looking for fruit and finally it's all been picked.

It's all been plucked. It's all gone. He's an empty vine. He's brought forth fruit to himself. He's taken it all away, feasted on it himself. There's nothing to show the fruitfulness of the Lord.

Indeed, adding insult to injury, he has then made altars to false gods up and down his land, saying, this is why we are so wealthy. This is why we are so prosperous.

But even in their state, Israel never quite abandoned the knowledge that somewhere along the line, somewhere in the back of their mind, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob was still kind of their God, really.

[3 : 29] Their national God, their sort of national identity. And so this idea that Jehovah is somewhere there in the background, that all these other gods are kind of more trendy now, that we still want to sort of keep both kind of happy.

As somebody recently posted on the Free Church website, you know, this idea after the situation in France and everybody saying, oh, the people in France, in our thoughts and prayers.

That's what politicians, godless politicians, are busy saying, oh, in our thoughts and prayers. Who is it that these people are praying to? Unless they're just lying. Unless it's just a sound bite, you know, oh, our thoughts and prayers.

They don't need it. These are thoughts and thoughts. And even that's probably not massively very long. But who is it that they're expecting people to pray to? And they no doubt would say, oh, well,

you know, the Muslims can pray to Allah and the Christians can pray to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Buddhists can pray to Buddha or whatever it is they pray to.

And all the Hindus can pray to all their gods and the unconverted Jews can pray to the God of the Old Testament or whatever the case may be. Everybody just pray to your God and it will all go up the same way.

[4 : 34] As the commentator rightly pointed out, that's really just piggant. All these different gods supposedly all achieving the same end. But this is the situation to which Israel had descended.

Jehovah is still in there. The true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is still in there, but their heart is divided, verse 2, between the true God and all these other gods.

You know, as Elijah said on Mount Carmel to the Israelite people, he came to all the people and said, how long halt he between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him.

And the people answered him, not at work. Now you would think that the state that the land was in by then, with Ahab and Jezebel worshipping Baal and setting up groves and shrines and altars all over the place, everybody would just be following suit.

Everybody would just be Baal worshippers. But most people were. But they also kind of worshipped Jehovah as well. They didn't like to sort of jettison the true God altogether, even if it's a case of kind of hedging their bets.

[5 : 42] But the idea that you could sort of have the true God and just sort of bring along these other gods as well. You know, tying it again in scripture, this is underlying this, being ridiculous.

As James says, chapter 1, verse 8, a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways. And at chapter 4, verse 8, draw nigh to God and he will draw nigh to you.

Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye double-minded. Double-minded. That's what's being talked about. You have a heart is divided. Now shall they be found faulty.

He shall break down their altars. He shall spoil their images. You see, it's worth about as much as if a man were to say to his wife, well, of course I love you, my dear.

I remember the vows I took to you years ago. Of course, it's just that I have these other women as well on the side. You know, I like my mistresses too and I like to have my affairs and my...

[6 : 38] But of course I love you as well and I make time for you as well and I feed you and clothe you and house you and, you know, and I have all these other people as well. What's the problem?

It's just more love to go around. That's just the kind of loving, tolerant, inclusive person that I am. Their heart is divided. What kind of fidelity is this?

What kind of meaning has such love? It is worthless. That she is worth no more to him than all these other people on the side. That the Lord Jehovah is worth no more to Israel than all these other gods and idols.

Their heart is divided. Now shall they be found faulty. The train is attempting to run on tracks that go in different directions. At once there will be a crash.

There will be literally a train wreck. And this is what Israel is like. A train wreck of its relationship with the Lord. That he shall break down their images. Shall spoil... Break down their altars.

[7 : 36] Spoil their images. Now they shall say, we have no king because we fear not the Lord. Now this is a reference to the fact that their king, Hoshia, ironically, having the same name as the prophet, but totally different in character.

We read that against him came up Shal and Esau, the king of Assyria. And Hoshia, this is 2 Kings 17, verse 3, became his servant and gave him presents.

And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshia, for he had sent messengers to Saul, king of Egypt, and the lord of the Pharaoh, and brought no present to the king of Assyria as he had done year by year.

Therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, made him a prisoner, and bound him in prison. Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, went up to Samaria, besieged it three years, while their king is already in captivity.

Then he took Samaria and it was destroyed. All the northern Israelites carried into captivity. We have no king now. He's a captive. We have no king because we feared not the Lord.

[8 : 37] What then should a king do to us? How can having a king help us if we've turned our backs upon the Lord? Because they've turned their back on the heavenly king, so now their earthly king can do them no good.

Now, you see the situation here. It says, they have spoken words, verse 4, swaying falsely and making a covenant. Israel was bound to the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by a covenant. They were a covenant of the nation, as is Scotland, historically speaking. And yet, we have turned our backs on that covenant time and again, particularly in the past century.

They have spoken words, swaying falsely and making a covenant thus judgment springeth up thus emlock in the furrows of the field. In every aspect of society, in the fruitfulness of the land, in the economy, in the jobs market and so on, everything we see decay in everything because the Lord has been deserted.

We have turned our backs on them. You see, Israel's work, it's their attitude to the Lord. If you can use a sort of earthly example, if you think of a sort of gangster scenario in like New York or Chicago or some other situation, you've got this ultimate godfather figure that everybody's terrified of.

[10:01] He's got all those henchmen with the machine guns and so on. And into his presence comes some little small-time crook who owes him maybe several thousand pounds. You know, it's not beyond his means to pay.

Let's say that the drunken crook, he's had a wee bit too much to drink and he starts coming up to the great big godfather figure and he starts insulting him and he starts giving him a light punch and saying how he's going to sort him out and you get the heavies and just itching fingers and he just stops them.

He won't let them do anything. He's just getting worse and worse. He's getting mouthier and mouthier and how he's going to do this and he's going to do that and the big sort of godfather figure who could squash him in a minute, who could turn all his businesses upside down, who could wipe out all his followers, who has so much power and so much clout, he just lets him run on.

He just lets him rant and rave and then, by lifting one little finger, he could just have him wiped out. And if the guy would just sober up and realise who it is that he's insulting, he would be absolutely white with fear.

But Israel has become so puffed up with a sense of its own importance, it thumbs its nose at the living God, far greater than any earthly criminal godfather, and makes out that it is as strong as the Lord, it can manage fine without the Lord, it can break its covenant, it doesn't need to worry about what it owes and just doesn't recognise how it is dicing with death here.

[11:32] And that when they finally wake up and when they sober up, they will be absolutely terrified. The inhabitants of Semanya shall fear because of the calves of Beth-Avon.

Now this is a reference to Beth-El, where one of the calves was, the golden calves that they worshipped, the other was in Dan in the far north of the country, but they've replaced the word Beth-El which literally means house of God as being unworthy of this description of the calves. Beth-Avon means literally house of vanity, house of emptiness, but it's a reference to Beth-El. For the people they all shall lord over it, the priests that rejoiced in it because people brought their sacrifices, it was a good source of income for them because it has departed from them.

It, the golden calf, shall be carried on to Assyria for a present to King Jared. Now the name Jared means defender. They had trusted in the Assyrians to defend them, to look after them, but instead because they rebelled against them, now they were about to be crushed by the Assyrians.

Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel. His own counsel in plotting with the king of Egypt against the king of Assyria, whose vassal he was meant to be, and his own counsel in setting up the golden calves in the first place.

[12:52] Now think on the reasons why that was done first. It was done first by King Jeroboam, the first of the northern kings of Israel, who thought that if people went away to Jerusalem to worship, they would simply return politically.

to Judah. So in other words, there was a short-term gain. If he could get people to do their worship, pretend it was the true God they were worshipping, set up the golden calves in Bethel and away up in the north in Dan, he thought he would secure his kingdom.

He was not the first political leader to think that a wee bit of short-term gain was worth selling his soul over. The disaster for himself and for his kingdom and for all those that he moved over just went on from generation to generation to generation.

How many prime ministers do you think have brought wrath on our country now because of their policies and the laws they have enacted, defying the living gods, telling themselves they were doing what was good, what was right, short-term gain, long-term disaster.

Short-term popularity, long-term judgment. not just for them, each of them will answer to the king of kings, each of them will stand before the Lord, but what about the country that took its lead from those set over, the prime ministers and first ministers and those set up in authority and the laws that they make defying the living God and we are all in a sense sharing in that guilt of our nation and here we too are brought into this relationship of fear and of judgment because of what our nation is up to against the Lord.

[14 : 41] The high places of even of vanity, the sin of Israel shall be destroyed, the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars and they shall say for the mountains cover us and to the hills fall on us.

Now, when the thorn and the thistle come up, it's an indication of neglect, of abandonment. If you think, for example, sometimes you see old croft houses maybe up on the hill or whatever and you can see, you know, there's a dyke maybe somewhere or ruins or a dyke somewhere and you can see that at one time there would have been a good going steady croft house there, the patch that's walled in, they would have cultivated that, there would have been a fire in the grate, a family in the home, people working away at it but because now it is abandoned, not only is it tumbled down, but weeds grow up through it, they sprout out of the stones in the wall that they grow up amongst the rocks.

Likewise, if you think of places where people used to worship in pagan base in these islands, little remains of standing stones and bits here and there and out, before they were all dug out and cleaned up for the tourists, these would just have been filled over by earth, they'd be abandoned, weeds growing over them because people had learned to turn away from them to the living God. Well, of course, they're a tourist attraction but this is the sense of it here, the thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars because they will be abandoned, left, deserted, desolate.

They were no use. They were never any use anyway but now even the people are taken away from them. As they abandon the Lord, so their altars will likewise be abandoned.

[16 : 20] But that doesn't mean not well, there's nothing to worry about then. They shall say to the mountains, cover us and to the hills, fall on us. Where do we hear that kind of phrase mentioned us?

Well, we find it in Luke's account of the Gospel in chapter 23 where, remember, Jesus is carrying his cross to Calvary and there followed him in verse 27 of Luke 23 a great company of people and of women which also bewailed and lamented him but Jesus turned up to them and said, daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me but weep for yourselves and for your children for behold, the days are coming and of which they shall say blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bear and the pacts which never gave sub then shall they begin to say to the mountains fall on us and to the hills cover us.

In other words, he's citing precisely this verse in Hosea for if they do these things in a green tree what shall be done in the dry? Now, what he's referring to there is the fact that, you know, the temple is still there, the Messiah has come, the teaching of the gospel is there in the midst of God's own people Israel, the tree is green, the time is right, the opportunity is the right time, it's God's time and in the midst of the green tree this is what they are doing to God the Son.

What will it be like when he is going to heaven when the apostles have left Jerusalem and gone to Perah when every last drop of faithfulness has been removed from Jerusalem, when the Romans come and besiege the city, when people are reduced to cannibalism, when the citizens are being crucified and there are hundreds round about the walls just to intimidate the defenders, what will happen when the tree is dry?

It will be completely destroyed. There will be absolutely nothing to live for. Then they'll say to the mountains, O follow us and to the hills cover us. What is it that is going to be so bad that people would rather be buried alive under the mountains of the earth than face it?

[18 : 28] Well, we're told in Revelation chapter 6, read it verse 15, the kings of the earth and the great men and the rich men and the chief captains and the mighty men and every bondman and every free man hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains and said to the mountains and rocks, follow us and hide us from the face of him that stood it on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb for the great day of his wrath has come and who shall be able to stand?

Now we think of a lamb, we think, ah, sweet, fluffy, nice, innocent, isn't it just great? And so many people will tell you that's what God is like, oh God is love, he's sweet and fluffy and nice and innocent.

The Bible talks about the wrath of the Lamb, the Lamb who has himself been slain from the foundation of the earth without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.

This is the Lamb that has paid the price of sin. It is the only needs of paying the price of sin. When we have rejected the Lamb of God, when they have crucified afresh to themselves the Son of God, if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?

They will say to the mountains, follow us and to the hills, cover us. People will be rushing it more and the creature wishing it could cover over them and save them from what?

[19 : 55] From the wrath of the Lamb. The wrath will come of mankind as a whole because of this rejection of the living God.

You know, the most damaging and most stealth-like sin of all is the sinner under the leaf. And when people say to themselves, oh, well, I'm not too bad, I'm not a bad person, I'm not a murderer, I'm not a rapist, I'm not a drug dealer, but I think if there is a God, I should be okay if there is one.

What about the worst, most cardinal, most damning sin of all, the sin of unbelief? By which hedging your bets, building as many altars as you can, and saying, well, we also worship Jehovah too.

Divided does this realize their heart is divided, now shall they be found faulty. No, choose this day, says Elijah, and he will say, why do you hold between two opinions?

If the Lord is God, serve them, but if Baal, if the false gods, the religions of this world, fine, serve them, but you're going to choose one way or another, sooner or later, because if you don't choose now, then your lack of choice for the Lord will be taken as choosing against him.

[21 : 16] He that is not with me is against me, says Jesus. He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad, but they shall say to the mountains, cover us, and to the hills, follow us.

This is not some dry, dusty prophecy from way back six, seven hundred years before Christ. This is one which Jesus himself reiterates on the morning of his crucifixion as he carries the cross to Golgotha.

This is that which John is given on Patmos in the revelation that men of all different stations and powers, kings and slaves and free men and bond men will all be in the same boat.

They will all be desperate to be buried alive rather than have to look upon the piercing gaze of the Lamb who is filled with such wrath against sin.

Not against individuals, but against sin which these individuals have embraced. at the cost of their salvation, the rejection of the Messiah, they shall say to the mountains, come us, and to the hills follow us, but nowhere do we live that the mountains and hills will comply.

[22 : 33] Because these are the same mountains and hills which generation after generation have witnessed the actions and heard the words of men in their defiance.

They have heard the sound of the gospel preached in the land. They have seen the deaf ears of which for so many multitudes it falls upon.

They will be witnesses. Nature, creation itself, will be witnesses against humankind at the last day. If we ourselves will not turn.

This is not ancient life, dusty history. This is by up to date. This is our need right now. Oh Israel, our sin from the days of Gibeah. We mentioned last week how that is a reference to Judges 19 and one of the most horrendous and depraved episodes in Israel's history before the days of the kings and the time of the judges.

But in that day it says there they stood. The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them. In other words, iniquity was not stamped out at that time.

[23 : 41] They didn't receive their judgment then despite all the thousands who were slaughtered. They didn't get destroyed then but they will be now. It is my desire I should chastise them and the people shall be gathered against them, when they shall bind themselves in their two fellows.

Ephraim is a heifer that is taught and loveth to tread out the corn that I passed over upon Ephraim. You see, there were different tasks you put your cattle to.

One of them was ploughing and that was hard work because you had a yoke on your shoulders as an option and you had to plough with a partner that you may or may not be able to plough with or get on with but you had to work the plough.

It was heavy to pull. It was hard work. Or there was another task which was treading out the corn that you did either in a set area and you did that by yourself without a yoke. Your hooves crunched up the corn and freshed it that way and you were allowed as a cattle because it said in the law to eat some of it from time to time.

I shall not muzzle the ox that he tread out the corn. That was a much nicer job and the cattle that did that job they tended to get fatter. Not surprisingly. Ephraim is his heifer that is taught and loved to tread out the corn.

[24 : 57] But I passed over upon her fair neck. I put the yoke back on her. I will make Ephraim to ride. That means in the sense of being thrown up and riding on the wind as Job says.

chapter 30 verse 22 Thou liftest me up to the wind Thou causest me to ride upon it and dissolve my substance. Like a kite being blown backwards and forwards in the wind.

So likewise she is to ride upon the wind. Judah shall plough, Jacob shall break his cords. They will be put back to servitude. They think that by turning their backs upon me they will be free.

It's not to be free, it's to become a slave. Then you turn your back on the Lord. Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

Now we read of course in Galatians. Be not deceived, chapter 6 verse 7, God is not mocked, for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

[26 : 04] For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of his flesh reap corruption, that he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary and welded, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy. Break up your fallow, that means empty, vain, having nothing in it, ground. And that is what we have in our ground, if we have not the Lord, it's empty, break it up, break up the fallow ground, it is time to seek the Lord, not to be weary and well-being, but to keep on seeking him till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

Now the rain was part of an essential process for harvesting. If you don't get the rains, you don't get a harvest, but you have to wait on the rain. You have to wait in the form of the matter of rains, especially in a dry country like Israel.

But if you sow to yourselves righteousness, that is what you will reap. If you plant potatoes, you're not going to reap apples. If you plant an apple tree, once it grows up and bears fruit, it's not going to be a pear tree.

What you sow, that's what you're going to reap. If you plant turnips, it will be turnips that will come up. It won't suddenly be runner beans or something different. What you put in is what will come out.

[27 : 19] There's no guarantee about the quality of the crop or how abundant it will be, but it will be of that specific type. Whatever vegetable or plant or corn you sow into the ground richly or poorly, that is what will come up.

And if you sow to the flesh, it is of the flesh that you will reap poorly or richly, a good harvest, a bad harvest, but it's only going to be the flesh. You are not going to be able to sow the flesh and reap righteousness in the spirit.

You're not going to be able to sow corn and reap apples. You're not going to plant potatoes and pull up turnips. What you sow is that what you're going to reap. no comment on how abundant or good the harvest might be, but it will be of that type which you have planted.

Sow to yourselves in righteousness. now we are taught that in Jeremiah and elsewhere in scripture that the Lord is the Lord our righteousness.

We have numbered them. Reap in mercy, break up your foul ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and rain righteousness upon you.

[28 : 30] He will come, so keep seeking. He will come, so keep plowing, keep sowing. There will be a harvest, so keep on going. You've plowed wickedness, you've reaped iniquity, there's a surprise.

You've eaten the fruit of lies, because thou distrust in thy way, the multitude of thine and men.

Therefore shall a tumult arise upon thy people, all thy fortresses shall be spoiled, one of the fortresses in Israel, in the day of Baccham, and then all the grisly reality of slaughter in those days. Israel doesn't stand a chance if she turns to her idols and turns to the world and the flesh Scotland doesn't stand a chance if she keeps turning her back upon the God of her fathers and upon the truth as it is in the Lord's word.

This is what he has given to us. No man, said Jesus, can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other or else he will hold to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve God and mammon. Now whatever method of government we may end up having, whether it's parliamentarian, whether it's monarchist, whether it's a dictatorship, whether it's a

Soviet republic, or whether it's a democracy.

[29 : 47] At the end of the day, these things are secondary. God can use any of them, and God can be glorified in any of them, if within them and under them, the nation is seeking to the living God.

Whether we are ruled from Westminster or Holy Road, whether the method of government is one we like or we don't like, whatever it is, above all, the nation will be exalted or be crushed, depending on the extent to which she seeks the Lord when he is to be found.

Now a nation, as opposed to a geographical country or state, a nation is its people. The Scottish nation is the Scottish people, whereas the Scottish land is the area between the border and the Shepards.

We're not talking merely about a geographical area. You can have a geographical area, at least it can be empty. It can get scarped nowadays or kill all but deserted where once there were people. Scotland is not yet deserted, but it is the nation that must turn to the Lord. It is the people that must turn to the Lord and not be divided, not be found faulty.

[31 : 01] This is our God for whom we have not waited as we ought but we must do so now. We must seek to them now individually in families as congregations as communities that is the only hope for our nation.

Otherwise particularly as we look around our own island area. We will be saved to the mountains that surround us. Let us cover us. Anything. Bury us alive. Plunge us in the depths of the sea.

Just don't let us have to look on the wrath of the lamb. There is a way of not having to look on the wrath of the lamb. And that is to look into the face of the mercy of Christ.

While yet this time this is by and up to date. This is God's living word for us now. Look unto me and be saved all the ends of the earth saith the Lord.

For I am God and there is none else. This is the God who saves. We may be an empty vine like Israel but God is full and rich in mercy.

[32 : 12] while yet there is time sow to yourselves in righteousness. Reap in mercy. Break up your fallow ground. It is time to seek the Lord.

Let's pray.